









A NEW ENGLAND
CACTUS

AND
OTHER TALES

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FRANK POPE HUMPHREY

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*A NEW ENGLAND
CACTUS.*



A NEW ENGLAND CACTUS.

IT was my good fortune one summer to board at Shoshon, an island off the south coast of New England. Many primitive customs, many ancient superstitions survive there, and in the speech and manners of its inhabitants there is a directness and simplicity which we are wont to associate only with a bygone age.

During the summer I partook of innumerable teas, which, as I could not decline them without wounding the proffered hospitality, would have been in any other condition of society an unbearable burden to the seeker after summer rest. But they proved a true recreation, having in them that element of change so insisted upon in modern hygiene.

The gossip around these tea-tables was of the kindest, and exhaled a fragrance of antiquity. It dwelt more with the past than the present. Especially was my hostess, good Mistress Tamson, an adept at this gentle gossip, and of

an evening over her knitting, when the household work was done, she poured into my willing ear a stream of local story and tradition.

I had early become acquainted with the Shoshon tailoress. A lane led to her house from the sandy highway, and by a stile near her garden fence access was had to a footpath which loitered beguilingly through the salt "ma'sh" to the sea. This was a favourite walk with me, and I seldom failed to have a word or two with her in passing, and after a while I formed a habit of going in daily.

Her garden, like all others on Shoshon, was of the old-fashioned variety, with Burgundy and white roses, pinks and box borders, and a tangle of hollyhocks, phlox, and tiger lilies. From out this bloom the old gambrel-roofed house lifted itself like a huge fungus, and to enter, I pulled the bobbin, as Red Riding Hood does in the story.

From the cheerful beauty of Prissy's garden to the bareness of her sitting-room was a long step, though only across the sunken threshold of her door. This room was wainscotted after the fashion of the time in which the house was built, a fashion that had its origin in economy of hangings, but which we have come to regard as wholly delightful and desirable. The low ceiling was arched in one corner to admit the top of the tall eight-day clock.

"Yes, I know all about Prissy," said Mistress Tamson one day in answer to a question of mine. "She and me were

girls together, and I know all about her. Her folks wa'n't never forehanded. Her father was drowned at sea before Prissy was born, and her mother was put to it to get enough to eat, and folks had to fall to and help her. She was always a marster hand to work, Waitstill Manter was, facultid and spry's a cat. She could turn her hand to most anything that come along.

"And as soon as she was big enough, Prissy learned her trade ; and when she was goin' on sixteen, Phœbe Tillson, the old tailoress, died, and Prissy had it all. She had growed up a perfect pictur', a leetle thing, slim and small, but lor ! with spunk enough, Jason used to say, to fit out a whole man-o'-war's crew.

"And the hopefulest creatur' ! her father right over again, Waitstill used to say. He always *would* think things was coming out right, and it used to pester Waitstill sometimes ; Waitstill was apt to get low.

"And 'Lisha Bartlett always set by Prissy when he wa'n't knee-high to a grasshopper. He used to fetch her beech-nuts and scallop-shells, and look after her when Waitstill was away to work, and as keeful of her now as if she'd 'a' be'n a piece of Injy chiny. They lived over to Chubby"—diminutive for Chappaquiddic Island—"them Bartletts did, and a more shif'less, good-for-nothin' set you never did see, except 'Lisha. He took after his mother's folks ; but the two girls were as like their father as peas in a pod, lazy and proud ; their mother, poor creatur', was dead,

and they kep' the house, and their slack ways must have been a dretful trial to 'Lisha, for he was neat's a pin.

"They pretended to set a sight o' store by Prissy in them days, comin' over to take tea with her, and plaguey glad to, for they lived on the little end o' nothin' whittled out to a p'int to home. That was when folks first begun to say that 'Lisha was pertic'lar to Prissy.

"After the old man died, 'Lisha hired the old Willis' place, and was guardeen to the girls. The place was kind o' tumble down, but it had a piazzy and a walk,¹ and prouder creatur's than them two you never see. 'Lisha was goin' with Prissy then reg'lar, comin' over Sunday nights, when he was to home, which wa'n't often to be sure; for he'd got to be third mate then. He begun to go to sea when he was fourteen; begun in the fo'c'stle and worked up.

"He went v'y'ges to the East Indies, and brought sights o' things home to Prissy, silks and crapes and sweet-smellin' fans—Lor, now!" and Mistress Tamson held her knitting suspended thoughtfully, "I shouldn't wonder a mite if Prissy had all them things packed away this minute in a camphire trunk under the eaves. 'T any rate, I don't see what she *has* done with 'em if she *haint*.

"'Lisha brought things to his sisters, too, for he was a good brother as ever

¹ A promenade upon the housetop, from whence could be seen the incoming and outgoing vessels.

lived, and bimeby folks begun to call 'em the Bedtick Bartletts, because they wore them seersuckers. They do say that in Ameriky"—for so the Shoshonians speak of the neighbouring continent, to which they seem to yield but a divided allegiance—"in Ameriky everybody wears seersucker now, but in them days nobody in Shoshon wore it but them as had folks in the Injy trade. And them Bedtick Bartletts wanted folks to know they was connected with folks in the Injy trade.

"Well, as I was sayin', 'Lisha was goin' with Prissy reg'lar then, and it did your eyes good to see the kind o' proud way he kep' lookin' down on her when they were walkin' home from meetin' together. For 'Lisha was tall and masterful, and never made no bones of how he loved Prissy. Some young men nowadays seem to be ashamed o' lovin' a girl. But 'Lisha never was. And if Prissy had be'n the Queen o' Sheby he couldn't be'n any prouder of her.

"And Prissy?—well, she jest set her eyes by 'Lisha, and Waitstill she used to warn her sometimes, feelin' herself kind o' low, and knowin' by experience how dretful uncertain things are, and thinkin' 'twas her duty to.

"'Prissy,' she'd say, 'don't you set your heart too much on marryin''Lisha. Things is dretful uncertain in this world; there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.'

"I didn't never blame Waitstill as some did for discouragin' Prissy, for,

poor creatur' ! she'd seen hard times, with her husband gettin' drowned before Prissy was born, and dretful sick then, and everybody sayin' she'd die for certain, and poor. It ain't for them the Lord has prospered to set in judgment on them He ain't.

"And Prissy would jest laugh and say, 'Leetle mammy, it ain't a vale o' tears ; it's a happy old world, and I'm the happiest creatur' in it ; and bimeby 'Lisha 'll give up goin' to sea, and build a nice big house, and mammy shall have the very nicest corner in it, and wear silk gowns every day, and rings on her fingers and bells on her toes if she wants to.' And then Waitstill couldn't say another word, only jest let the child be happy.

"Well, bimeby word come the owners were goin' to make 'Lisha cap'n, and then you couldn't touch them Bedtick Bartletts with a ten-foot pole. And they treated Prissy reelly shameful, a-flirtin' past her in the meetin'-house of a Sabba' day, as though the Lord had made 'em of different kinds o' dust. But they had to come to it. For 'Lisha come home all alive to be married after the next v'y'ge ; and Prissy agreed to it, and gave up her tailorin'. And they had to treat her decent ; though they did say 'twas a shame for him to take up with a tailoress, when he might marry the owner's darter. But there ! the pesky creatur's always lied so, there was no believin' nothin' they said.

"And Prissy spun and wove and bleached, and made rufflin' and flutin',

and a happier creatur' you never did see, singin' from mornin' to night, and her cheeks a growin' pink and her eyes like stars, and everybody a rej'icin' with her.

"Well, bimeby it come time for 'Lisha to come home. He'd be'n gone most three year, and Prissy had heerd only twice from him. Folks didn't hear from sea-farin' folks then as they do now, and jest had to wear their hearts out waitin'. But lor! Prissy didn't wear her heart out; she wa'n't that kind. And she always seemed to think nothin' *couldn't* happen to 'Lisha. And she got everything ready but the standin'-up gown, and that 'Lisha was goin' to bring.

"And one day she was settin' by the window singin' and rufflin', when who should she see comin' up the path but 'Lisha. She said afterwards he looked kind o' pale, and when she waved her hand to him he didn't smile as she expected. But she noticed he had on a vest she made him. And she jumped up and run downstairs as quick as could be, so's to open the door for him. But when she opened it there wa'n't nobody there, not a livin' soul!

"Waitstill heerd the door open, and come to see who it was; and there was Prissy runnin' round like a mad creatur', and callin' out, 'Lisha! 'Lisha! where be y'?' And Waitstill took hold of her and said, 'Prissy, are y' crazy? or what's the matter with y'? 'Lisha ain't here.' Then Prissy kind o' come to and calmed

down, and told Waitstill what she'd seen. And they looked all 'round for 'Lisha, thinkin' he'd hid mebbe, for he was a marster feller for a joke. But he wa'n't there. And then Waitstill up and spoke right out before she thought. 'Prissy,' says she, 'it's a warnin'; 'Lisha's dead.'

"But Prissy wouldn't hear to that no way, and kind o' laughed it off, and said 'twas her imagination. 'Twa'n't a mite strange, she said, that she should imagine she see 'Lisha when she was thinkin' on him the whole durin' time. And so the minister said, for Waitstill went to him about it.

"And so Prissy waited and waited, but 'Lisha never come back. And folks said the ship must 'a' be'n lost in one of them East Injy hurricanes and everybody drowned. And after a spell Prissy took up tailorin' again, and has worked at it ever sence."

After that I used to try to find in Prissy some trace of the pink-cheeked, starry-eyed girl of whom Mistress Tamson had told me, but ineffectually.

Her face was like a winter-dried apple, full of wrinkles. She wore commonly a blue and white checked kerchief pinned under her chin. She must have shrunk even from her former diminutive size, for she was abnormally small.

She sang a good deal over her work—hymns, together with those serio-comic ballads in which New England folk-lore is so rich, such as the famous "Springfield Mountain." Each couplet of this ballad was sung to the refrain—

“ Ri ru ri ru ri, ru ri ray,
Ri ru ri ru ri, ru ri ray.”

Crooned to a monotonous air, the effect was irresistibly droll, and the tragic conclusion usually found me in a paroxysm of laughter, in which Prissy, who had sung with the utmost gravity, joined.

Another favourite ballad was the pathetic history of Obadiah Squashvine and his Dolly :

“ Now Obad he did get his livin’
By sawin’ wood, likewise a splittin’, ‘ittin’,
‘ittin’ ; ”

While

“ Dolly she did get her livin’
By spinnin’ yarn, likewise a knittin’, ‘ittin’,
‘ittin’ . ”

One day, in the pursuance of his legitimate calling—

“ His right fingers off he sawed, ‘awed,
‘awed.”

With which catastrophe and the falling of Dolly into a “swound ’ound ’ound,” the ballad ends.

She sung these ballads and others like them with such abandon, such an evident appreciation of their delicious absurdity, that it was difficult to believe that this blithe old woman could be one with the imaginative girl to whom the ghost of her dead lover had come back.

But one day I learned how shallow may be our judgments. I was sitting

with her in the wainscotted sitting-room in the twilight. After a long silence, broken only by the murmur of the surf hard by, she began to sing to herself crooningly, and after a fashion that indicated that she had forgotten my presence. Her voice was sweet but tremulous.

Song followed song, old melodies full of fire and a passionate sweetness, love songs all of them. Ridiculous as it may seem, I found the tears running down my cheeks as I listened. The moon came round the corner of the house from the east, and looking in at the window shone full on her face. And then I knew that the starry-eyed imaginative young girl and the wrinkled old woman were indeed one. As her voice died away at the conclusion of—

“Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast
On yonder lea, on yonder lea.
My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee ;
Or did misfortune's bitter storms
Around thee blaw, around thee blaw ;
Thy bield should be my bosom
To share it a', to share it a'.”

I slipped out and over to Mistress Tamson's without saying “good-night.”

The next day I was again in her sitting-room, and Prissy was her old self once more ; that is, the self with which I was familiar. Her mother was fussing about a window where grew a cactus green and lusty, but barren of flowers. Its thorns scratched her.

“The pesky thing !” she said, petu-

lantly. "Why can't you throw it away, Prissy?"

Prissy, who was pressing the seams in a trouser's leg with her goose, sighed, but said nothing. Soon her mother went out to sun herself among her beds of sage and thyme, and then Prissy, putting the goose down by the fire and taking up her needle, said, sighing once more, "Poor mother! she's always scratchin' herself with that cactus. But I can't bear to throw it away, for 'Lisha gave it to me."

She paused while I waited breathlessly, hoping she would go on. In a moment she did so.

"He gave it to me before he went away the last time. One of the owner's wives gave it to him for me. He'd told her about me. Cactuses wa'n't common in them days. And 'Lisha says, says he, 'It's the handsomest blossom you ever set eyes on, Prissy, and as big as a quart bowl.' It was a leetle thing then, only three months old, 'Lisha said. 'And it'll bloom in just about three year, Prissy,' says he. 'And so when you see it buddin' you'll know I'm comin'.'

"And how I did watch that cactus! It was growin' in the same blue jar 'tis now; 'Lisha brought it from China. I watered it once a week; I've always done that. 'Lisha told me to. That's what the owner's wife said, and I never let a speck of dust stay on it, and it grew and grew like grass in a wet May, and when it was nigh on to three years old I began to watch for buds. Folks used to laugh and say they'd as soon

think of growin' a thistle, or a burdock in the window. But I didn't mind their laughin' a mite. For my heart was as light's a feather, thinkin' about 'Lisha's comin' back, and how I was goin' with him the next v'y'ge. For we'd planned it all out, and Cousin Nabby was comin' to stay with mother. I was young then, and mighty curious to see the fureign countries 'Lisha had told me about. But there! as for that matter, I'd 'a' gone to the end o' the world and back again blindfolded, only to have been with him."

She paused a moment and then went on. "Well, bimeby the cactus was three years old, and one day I saw a bud startin'. 'Twas a leetle thing, but it was big with promise to me, and I watched it grow every day and every hour in the day. And every time I looked at it I said, "'Lisha's comin'." But I never told anybody about that bud, and I never told anybody what 'Lisha said. I couldn't ever talk o' them things, but I kep' 'em in my heart as the Scriptur' says Mary did. And I hope it ain't wicked for me to say that, for 'pears to me there's nothin' sacreder in this world than love.

"Well, the leetle bud grew proper fast, and bimeby it begun to show pink, and one day, when it looked as if it would bloom out any minute, somethin' strange happened. I was sittin' in the south gable window rufflin' and singin' to myself, when—p'r'aps you've heerd about my seein' 'Lisha?"

The question was so unexpected I had

no time to frame an answer, and I replied simply, "Yes, Mistress Tamson told me, and I am so sorry for you Prissy."

I spoke as though the event had happened the day before, and I know my eyes were brimming with tears, but hers were dry. And I found myself wondering if her sorrow had been a tearless one, or was it floods of tears that had dimmed the starry eyes which were now pale and wan like ghosts of eyes?

"It was jest such a day as this," she went on, "sunny and warm, only earlier in the season. The bees were hummin' 'round the laylocks, and I was sittin' thinkin' about him, and how beautiful everything was, and what a happy world God had made for His creatur's, when—there he was !

"Well, after I'd got over it a spell, I thought o' my cactus, and went to look at it, thinkin' the sight o' the bud and what 'Lisha said about it might comfort me mebbe. And there 'twas, broke and withered, and if mother hadn't ketched me I'd a tumbled on to the floor. And mother said most likely the cat jumped up and broke it, for 'twas tender. And mother didn't mistrust what that broken bud meant to me, and I didn't tell her. And I made her promise not to tell folks about my seein' 'Lisha. And she said she wouldn't; and I s'pose she didn't for a spell. And she tried to comfort me, and said she guessed I only imagined I see 'Lisha; though first she said 'twas a sign, and he was dead.

"So I begun to pick up again, for

'twa'n't never in my natur' to look on the dark side. And I said I didn't believe God would put such a love into my heart jest to disapp'int it. And I didn't believe He'd take 'Lisha and never let me see him again. But I was ignorant of the Lord's ways then, poor creatur'!"

She spoke with an almost divine compassion, as of some one far removed from herself, looking back, as it were, from the heights of her secure and serene old age upon the undisciplined girl just entering upon life's steep and rugged way.

"And I was so sure 'Lisha would come soon that mother said we'd best make the weddin' cake so's to be ready. For mebbe he would have to sail again right away. So we made the weddin' cake and the bride cake, and everything was ready but the standin'-up gown, and that 'Lisha was goin' to bring. And Elviry Holmes was spoke to, to come the very minute he got here and make it. 'Twas goin' to be white and silver; silver rosebuds on a white ground; for that was what I told 'Lisha I wanted.

"But 'Lisha didn't come. And bimeby word come that the ship had sailed on such a day; but she was never spoke. So they said she was lost and all her crew.

"But I wouldn't believe it. 'Twas so dretful hard to give up 'Lisha. I used to think mebbe he had escaped and was livin' on a desert island like Robinson Crusoe. And many's the night I've laid awake thinkin' of him there, watchin'

or some vessel to come and take him off. And many's the time I've thought I heerd his step comin' up the path.

"And when twenty years had gone by I wouldn't believe then but he'd come back some time. I'd heerd of such things — of men bein' wrecked and comin' home after twenty years. But when thirty years went by, and forty, then I knew that 'Lisha would never come back no more. And then mother begun to lose her mind and fret about the cactus. It pestered her, and sometimes I'd think I'd throw it away. But I couldn't never do it. And it grew and grew, and 'Lisha never come back. And it's fifty years to-day sence he sailed the last time ; and I'm seventy, and mother's in her hundredth year."

It was not long after this that Prissy's mother died, or "fell on sleep," a phrase much more correctly descriptive of her departure from life. She had been out among her beds of thyme and sage all the morning, and coming in tired had sat down in her easy chair by the door, just where the shadows of the hop vine danced most merrily upon the floor, and saying, "I'll jest take a leetle nap now, Prissy," had dropped gently and without knowledge of it into her eternal sleep.

From that time Prissy's hold on life began to loosen. I often found her lying upon the couch in her sitting-room when I went in for my daily visit. She would jump up briskly at my entrance and declare that she didn't know what had got into her bein' so lazy ; and she

guessed she should have to take a leetle elderberry wine to chirk her up. She gave up tailoring, and her needle lay idle in her basket, and her goose rested from its half century of labour upon the jamb by the brick oven. She sang no more the cheerful old ballads, and would often sink into a reverie which lasted an hour by the ancient clock in the corner, and the spell of which I was careful not to break by word or movement.

I fancied that at these times she was living in the past—a past the bare memory of which had power to smooth her wrinkles and flush her cheek with the wild rose tint of her girlhood, for she seemed to my eyes to grow young. She laid aside her usual head covering, the blue and white checked kerchief, together with her “front,” for her head was hot, she said, and they were in the way when she wanted to lie down. Her hair, thus released from confinement, curled softly and silkily all over her head, as I fancied it might have done when it was a golden brown instead of snow white.

Her dress had always been of the commonest, and though she did not give up her dark blue calicoes or black alpacas, she added to them of an afternoon delicately coloured kerchiefs of Chinese crape, which must have been among the gifts that 'Lisha had brought her, and concerning which Mistress Tamson had spoken.

It was one day after one of these reveries that she showed me 'Lisha's portrait. She took it from the bosom

of her gown, where it hung concealed on a slender gold chain. When she handed it to me, saying, "Here's 'Lisha's pictur'," I took it, expecting to see, if not the silhouette of the early part of the nineteenth century, hundreds of which adorn the "mantletry pieces" of Shoshon, yet at least the work of a prentice hand in the fine art of portraiture. So I was surprised when my eyes fell upon a picture on ivory, exquisitely done.

"He had it took in fureign parts," Prissy said, as I exclaimed at the quality of its workmanship. "And it looks jest like him."

He was "tall and masterful," Mistress Tamson had said, and I recalled her words as I eagerly scanned the face encircled by its rim of old red gold. It gave me the impression of being wonderfully like the original. The sunny blue eyes had a steadfast look, and the face, with its mingled strength and sweetness, was one to inspire confidence. I said so as I gave it back to Prissy.

"Yes," she replied, in that assured tone which is the index of a perfect faith. "Yes, I could always trust 'Lisha. Why, when I was a leetle mite of a girl, and he was nothin' but a boy, if he said anything wouldn't hurt me I knew it wouldn't. And I wasn't afeared. One time we were belated huckleberryin', and had to come through the Dark Woods after sundown—a dretful black place. And I cried first, but 'Lisha said, "Lor, Prissy! jest take hold o' my hand, you needn't be afeared;" and I

wasn't. Mother used to say she believed I'd jump off the meetin'-house steeple if 'Lisha only said 'twouldn't hurt me."

She held the portrait in her hand for a long time and looked at it. "Fifty year," she went on in a low tone, more to herself than to me, "fifty year sence I see him, and I'm an old woman now. I wonder what he's been doin' all this time, and how he looks. They don't grow old there. I shall know him. It is born a natural body ; it is raised a spiritual body. I sometimes set and wonder what that Scriptur' means. But it'll be 'Lisha. I shall know him. And what sights o' things I've got to tell him ! I've been layin' 'em up all these years—things I couldn't tell to nobody but 'Lisha. And what sights o' things he's got to tell me, jest as he used to when he come home from fureign parts. And wonderfuller things, too ; eye hath not seen nor ear heard. We shall jest want to set down and talk and talk. Eternity won't be a mite too long."

And, as I listened, I grew ashamed of an opinion that I have shared doubtless with countless fellow mortals—that romance is limited to the period of youth. Out upon the fallacy ! Youth is the period of sentiment, not of romance. Romance is a product of sound living, and bears its consummate flower only in old age.

Mistress Tamson was quick to discern the change in Prissy. "Prissy ain't well, she looks real kind o' spindlin'. She wants buildin' up," she said.

And forthwith she proceeded to the garret where hung her aromatic herbs, pennyroyal, everlasting, thoroughwort, and catnip, and her big leaves of plantain which, dipped in hot rum, were a sovereign remedy for "rheumatiz" and "neurology." From these she made a selection and concocted a malodorous mess, which she called "bitters," and which I took over to Prissy in a yellow quart bowl, and of which Prissy sipped delicately, pouring the larger part down the sink spout.

The old doctor came in to see her in a neighbourly way, and talked at first of giving her a "leetle tinctur," for he, too, was old-fashioned and of Prissy's generation. But Prissy demurred. She wasn't sick, she said, only tired. She guessed she should feel better after a spell. And so the doctor finally guessed.

"We old folks can't expect to be as spry as we used to be," he said. "The machinery is getting rusty, and the best oil is plenty of good victuals." Then he looked at Prissy's flowers, and she gave him a bunch of chrysanthemums for his wife, and he went away. But I had seen how keenly the kindly eyes had scanned Prissy, and I had read in them that neither "tinctur" nor "good victuals" would long avail to retain in the body the spirit so eager for departure.

Meanwhile the year was ripening. The October days came, which, when they are fair, are the fairest of all. It was high time for me to bid good-bye

to this enchanted island, and betake myself to the more prosaic world which lay beyond the pale blue sea. But, loth to go, I lingered. And the ships, sailing to and fro on this windless, autumnal sea, were in no greater haste seemingly. With every thread of canvas spread, the progress they made was so unappreciable they seemed at last to melt rather than sail into the far horizon.

The sun made his daily journey from east to west through a cloudless sky, while a tender haze brooded at all times over the island, filling its dimpled vales and softening the outlines of its rocks. The pale green and gray of the marshes gave place to more gorgeous colours. The flight of the sea-gull grew silent, and the waters all around were filled with coots having a round white spot under each wing, which gave them when flying the semblance of butterflies sporting over a field of azure.

By the wayside and by the sea, on bluff and on plain, bloomed the great spreading panicles of the golden-rod. No frosts came, and the nights were balmy, and the full harvest moon filled them with her pale splendour. The gardens were gay with dahlias and asters and other late flowers, and the fishermen came in laden with scallops, which they opened and prepared for the markets of New York, the last of the season's fishing harvest.

I coaxed Prissy, who, it must be owned, however, needed little coaxing, what time she did not lie upon her couch, to stay out of doors, dawdling

with me about the marshes, which seemed to have an even greater charm for her than for myself. But after a while, as she grew weaker, even these little excursions were laid aside, and we sat on the porch which looked out on the sea, day after day, for by now I rarely left her except for the night.

It may seem strange to you, as it often did to me, that I, the acquaintance of a brief summer, should have been so much more to her than any of the life-long friends who now cared for her so assiduously and so tenderly. But so it was. To none, I have reason to believe, had she ever spoken so freely of the great sorrow of her life.

"Prissy seems to have kind o' took to you," Mistress Tamson remarked one day. "And I'm glad on't. She's always be'n a creatur' set apart as 'twere ever sence 'Lisha was drowned. A-helpin' every livin' creatur', and kind, but keepin' her own sorrow all to herself. Now I don't s'pose I've heerd her speak o' 'Lisha a half a dozen times in all these years. But I mistrust she's talked to you about him." Mistress Tamson paused tentatively. But I was silent. If Prissy had been dumb as regarded her great sorrow, I certainly had no right to speak.

She had never been off Shoshon, and had come in contact with few but island people. Doubtless the neighbouring continent seemed to her as far away as Japan. Both alike were unknown lands. And from out this unknown world beyond the sea, I had

come to her just at the time when her heart was fullest of memories, when her thoughts were travelling back into the past, as the sun at his setting casts his parting beams on the Eastern hills. And, belonging to another world than hers, she had confided to me, as one may to a being from a different sphere, thoughts and emotions it is impossible to impart to the dearest and best. Such, at least, was the explanation I made to myself.

Since hearing Prissy's story I had never ceased to regard the cactus with interest. It entirely filled one of the two south windows. It had ceased growing for some time, apparently, for there was none of the fresh, tender green of a new growth about it. It was kept spotlessly free from dust, as was the blue and white jar, the small window-panes, and the woodwork about the windows. In its homeliness and bareness it was a type of Prissy's own life.

Its one solitary bud had withered. Was it never to bloom?

I was asking myself that question one day as I stood looking at it, when I made a discovery that almost took my breath away.

"Why, Prissy!" I exclaimed, "it's budded! one, two, three—there are nine buds on it! the cactus is going to bloom!"

"Yes," said Prissy, "he's comin'."

She was lying on the couch, and as I noticed the transparency of the small hands clasped idly upon her bosom,

although her cheeks were pink, I knew his coming could not be far. For I had caught her meaning. I remembered that he had said, "When you see it budding, Prissy, you'll know I'm coming." It had budded once, and the bud had withered before its bloom, heralding but the pale spectre of her lover. Now—now,—but the time drew on apace.

Rapidly as the buds grew, so rapidly did Prissy fail. It almost seemed as though they absorbed into themselves the life that was passing.

One night she asked me to stay with her. She gave no reason for the request, only saying, "Stay with me to-night, dear." Mistress Tamson shared the watch with me. For several days Prissy had not sat up. The old-fashioned turn-up bedstead, which commonly, through the day, stood hidden behind the curtains of furniture-patch, was not put up. It fronted the window so that she lay where she could look upon the cactus. Through the night she was restless, and wandering at times—wandering, as her few broken words indicated, in the far-away land of her girlhood. Towards daybreak she grew quiet and slept.

"I'll jest step over and set father's breakfast to goin' and come right back," said Mistress Tamson, in a hoarse whisper. "She seems kind o' quiet now, and you'd best lop down on the lounge and get a nap."

I did not act, however, on Mistress Tamson's suggestion; though, weary

from the night's watch, I dozed in my chair. I awoke with a start. Prissy was leaning upon her elbow looking eagerly towards the window. I followed her glance with mine, and there, with the morning light falling full upon them, bloomed the nine great gorgeous flowers, radiant with the concentrated glory of half a century of suns.

I turned to Prissy. She had fallen back upon her pillow and lay panting, her eyes fixed in glad recognition. A moment, and a white shadow—the two words may seem irreconcilable, but they alone can express what I saw—a white shadow swept over her, like the passing of innumerable silvery wings, and her eyelids fell.

To the long-waiting heart the absent lover had come at last.



A CAR OF LOVE.



A CAR OF LOVE.

UNCLE ZADOC and Uncle Paul were brothers-in-law, but they loved each other none the better for that.

Uncle Paul was a hornet, small, agile, with light, crisp hair and grey-blue eyes.

Uncle Zadoc, with his great size, ponderous tread, slow movements, and heavy hanging head, was the ox whom the hornet delighted to torment.

Each had a will of his own, but Uncle Zadoc oftenest got his. He was slow, but sure. He never fretted, but pulled straight ahead, while Uncle Paul expended himself in irritable buzzings and useless side attacks upon his huge adversary.

They had disagreed upon everything and everybody from boyhood. If you knew upon which side of any question Uncle Zadoc ranged himself, then you could tell exactly where to find Uncle Paul.

Uncle Zadoc was a democrat. Uncle Paul was a Whig. The latter was a

Calvinist of the deepest dye. The former a mild Unitarian. Both were constant attendants upon the one church, the Trinitarian Congregational, and between them managed to keep the successive incumbents in perpetual hot water.

At one period of their lives, however, and upon one subject they had agreed. The period was when they were twenty-three or thereabouts, and the subject was pretty Polly Higginson. They both considered Polly the sweetest girl in Mantit, and each determined to marry her, and of course Zadoc won. Three months after, Paul in revenge married Zadoc's sister, and repented at his leisure. For Abigail was the feminine counterpart of her brother, and irritated the waspish Paul beyond endurance.

Time is a great mellower, not only of Rhode Island greenings, but of dispositions. People as they grow older grow milder, as a general thing; the acrid pulp sweetens. But time did not soften the animosity between these two. Uncle Paul's crisp hair whitened, and the wrinkles took possession of his smooth pink face with an alacrity only equalled by that of squatters on freshly-opened United States territory. Uncle Zadoc early became a martyr to rheumatism, but he was still able to give whacking blows to his assailant, whose sting time seemed only to sharpen.

They lived about a quarter of a mile apart as the bird flies, though the distance by the winding road was

twice that. They rarely met, for it was the life-business of Polly and Abigail to keep them apart. The experience of these two women was that of the owners of dogs that never meet without flying at each other's throats.

Polly and Abigail agreed very well, excellently in fact. It was impossible to get up even the shadow of an excuse to quarrel with Polly. She was the mildest of human beings. Though I would by no means give the impression that she was weak. Weakness is no guarantee of peace, but the contrary. But Polly had an amiability of temper that, like good wine, never soured. Its vintage was of the best.

"Your father never spoke a cross word to me in his life, Henry," she once said to her son.

"And no credit to him, mother, if he hasn't. Only a brute could do that," was the reply.

Henry's experience of his father's temper differed somewhat from his mother's. Still, as yet he had nothing to complain of. He was an only child, and had been coddled inordinately, as such unfortunates usually are.

As he grew up he grew into the farm-work, and it was understood that he was always to remain at home. By and by he would marry—at least so Uncle Zadoc and Aunt Polly had decreed in private council. When that auspicious event should take place an addition would be made to the roomy old farmhouse, which would make it quite ample for two families. And

Aunt Polly had visions of grandchildren, a rosy group growing up about her knees. Other young men were emigrating to Michigan and the wilds farther West, in order to better their fortunes. But what better fortune could Henry desire than to inherit the old farm, whose rich fields and fallows, woods and meadows, had been in the family since 1650, when the first white settler of what is now Mantit ventured to plant himself thus far from the Plymouth settlement?

In due time Henry had come of age, and had voted. The occasion was a presidential one, and he had voted of course the democratic ticket. His father remarked with satisfaction that in every respect but one Henry was proceeding in the right track. As to election and reprobation, he laughed them to scorn, and in more than one metaphysical combat over those two doctrines, in that public arena, "the Store," had worsted Uncle Paul, or, at any rate, had talked him down, which was felt to be equivalent to a victory.

Like his father, he cherished the largest hope for the race. The former, however, made one exception. Most of us have an exception. Had Uncle Zadoc been closely questioned, he would have been obliged to confess to doubts as to whether he and Uncle Paul could ever get on peaceably together even in the broadest and most ample of heavenly courts.

The one point in which Henry's conduct was not entirely satisfactory to

his father was this:—he was in no haste to marry. He had reached the mature age of twenty-seven, and although everything had been carefully planned to that end, even the trees selected and marked which were to form the framework of the proposed L, he showed no sign of settling.

So far as the girls were concerned, he disported himself like a June bee in his mother's flower garden, roaming from phlox to tiger-lily, from pink to lavender with the utmost impartiality. He walked home with one girl from the singing-school, with a second from the Debating Society, and took a third on the annual sleighride to Sampson's Tavern, where there was a dance and a supper.

"I don't see what makes our Henry so shifty-minded; he don't take after me. I'd made up my mind what girl I should marry by the time I was eighteen, and I never changed it. And I know, mother, you never thought of anybody but me."

Aunt Polly was putting a pan of biscuits into the Yankee baker, and it was stooping over that perhaps that made her cheeks so rosy. At any rate they were quite flushed as she straightened herself and said, "Oh, well, father, I guess Henry will settle down by and by. There ain't no time past." Naturally, as a mother, she was in no haste to part with her boy if only to live in the proposed addition.

As I have said, though the distance by the highway between the two

houses of these brothers-in-law was half a mile, as the bird flies it was much less, and two people could readily talk from one to the other, provided they possessed voices of sufficient compass. And it was Uncle Paul's habit when more than ordinarily irascible to go out upon the level green in front of his house and express adverse opinions concerning Uncle Zadoc loud enough for him to hear.

Uncle Paul's light fusillade and Uncle Zadoc's heavy artillery in reply were distinctly heard, not only by each other, but by the neighbours far and near. They came in time to be as much a part of the natural order of things, and caused as little remark as the crowing of the cocks at dawn, or the thunder that came up from the south-west.

Two wide-spreading sycamores stood on the verge of the green just where it dropped ten feet to the highway. And it was upon this verge that Uncle Paul danced up and down and exploded. It was here that during the presidential campaign he shrieked his opinions concerning "Clayhound" (Calhoun of South Carolina), mixed with terrific prophecies of the probable results to the country of the triumph of democracy as illustrated by the atrocities of Robert Spear (Robespierre) and his "gullytin." Uncle Paul's notions of the French Revolution were distinctly second-hand, having been derived from his father, who was a contemporary. But they were none the less lurid for

that. He was a very Ezekiel of prophecy.

"If you could have your way, you miserable cussed loco-foco, you!" he shouted to Uncle Zadoc, who was leisurely yoking his oxen preparatory to drawing logs to the saw-mill, "you'd set up the gullytin in our free kentry and cut all our throats. But y' won't! y' won't! We'll wring Clayhound's neck for him so's he'll never squeak ag'in, the cussed bloodhound! Let him stick to his niggers, and not be plottin' to ketch and gullytin free American citizens. 'Twas a bad day for this kentry when the fust loco-foco put up his head and peeped; a lot o' p'isonous sarpints hatched out by that cussed French infiddle, Tom Jefferson!" This speech was delivered with frantic gesticulations, and with many breaks caused by failure of breath, but in a piercing voice that did not fail to reach Uncle Zadoc's ear.

"Shut up, you blasted fool, and go in and get Nabby to put a blister on your head!" he roared in reply, as he touched the off-ox with his whip, and started up his team, the creaking and groaning of which warned Uncle Paul that further attempts at an interchange of views were useless.

* * * *

It was a fine May morning, and early; in fact, the sun was not yet up, and the whole heavens, from zenith to horizon, was of a fine saffron, deepening to vermillion in the east. Uncle Paul was dancing up and down upon the verge of

the green in a state of intense excitement. He was hatless, and his crisp white hair stood out around his pink face like a halo. This time he had a grievance indeed.

A year before, a new school-house had been built in the district, over the proposed site of which a prolonged and bitter discussion had raged at the preliminary school meetings. Some proposed the old site, and the district fool—for old New England, like King Lear, always had its fool—moved that the new school-house be built on the site of the old one, and that the latter be left standing until the new one should be completed. His proposition was received with shouts of laughter, that puzzled the poor fellow not a little. He saw nothing humorous in his proposition.

But the laughter soon gave way to serious business. Uncle Paul and Uncle Zadoc had each his chosen site, and each had his band of followers. The two sites were about half a mile apart, and between them there was really little choice. But the struggle was as prolonged and hot as though some lofty principle or millions of dollars had been at stake. And all the hotter that the combatants were so equally matched. Vote after vote was a tie. Meeting after meeting adjourned. But at last Uncle Paul's faction carried the day by a majority of one. A recreant follower of Uncle Zadoc, weary of the struggle, yielded, and, declaring "there wasn't the value of a red cent's difference

between the two," threw his vote on the opposite side.

Uncle Paul was chosen by the triumphant party to hire the carpenters, draw up the contract, and oversee the job. But small regard was paid to the architecture of the building. The New England school-house of that day was an oblong or square box, pierced on two sides by windows. In the centre of the third was a door, while the fourth was a blank. It was simplicity itself, and belonged to that order which includes the log hut and the wattled cote.

Uncle Paul watched the rise and progress of this building with an interest and delight in which the proud sense of having beaten Uncle Zadoc was no small factor. And this delight he did not hide under a bushel. He flaunted it abroad on all occasions and everywhere. He chuckled loudly over the fact that he had got the better of that cussed loco-foco this time.

I do not like that word "cussed"; but as Uncle Paul never spoke of his adversary without prefixing to his name this or some other objurgatory adjective, it behoves me as a veracious chronicler not to suppress it; and it really was one of the mildest in Uncle Paul's somewhat varied vocabulary.

But Uncle Paul's delight was premature. In Abigail's own words, he was "crowing before he was out of the woods." After all his years of experience he did not know his adversary. It was Uncle Zadoc's proud boast that he "never gave in." He

would have made an admirable party in an Italian vendetta. He emulated the Yorkshireman, of whom it is written that "he can keep a stone in his pocket seven years, turn it at the end of that time, keep it another seven years, hurl it, and hit his mark at last."

Not that he was given to hurling stones, or to stabbing in the dark. He was a New England citizen in good and regular standing, and would have committed to gaol, by a prompt verdict, any one guilty of such infringement of the laws. But in the spirit that hurls the stone and sends the knife home he was not deficient.

The school-house was finished in time for the winter term. But before the opening of the summer term Uncle Zadoc was ready to strike. He had carefully rallied his forces, and had secured two of Paul's followers—two fathers of families, living on the extreme eastern verge of the school district who would like to have the school-house nearer. A school meeting was called, and before Uncle Paul had fairly collected his faculties, scattered by the suddenness of the move, a vote was passed to move the school-house half a mile to the east, and put it upon the exact spot selected by Uncle Zadoc the year before.

In vain Uncle Paul spluttered and remonstrated. His opponents stood firm, and—culminating insult!—Uncle Zadoc, who owned a stout team of oxen and the necessary tackling, was chosen to oversee the moving.

This it was that had brought him out to pour upon the head of his enemy all the bitter invectives at his command on this fair May morning. The school meeting was the night before. The moving was to take place that very day. The brightening sky, the songs of the robins in the sycamores, the scent of apple-blossoms, even the gentle lowing of the cows waiting in the yard to be milked failed to distract his mind from the bitter sense of defeat.

Just as the sun came up, the front door of the gray, gambrel-roofed house opened, and a young girl stepped out. She crossed the green with a quick step, and laid her hand upon Uncle Paul's arm. She was his only child Grace, and was fair as the morning. In the exquisite words of our English poet of the dawn—

“As fair as is the bright to-morrow,
That healeth sicke folks of nighte's sorrow.”

Her resemblance to Uncle Paul as she stood, or rather walked to and fro by his side, with her hand on his arm, was wonderful. The same fair skin and pink cheeks; the same crisp hair, but golden; the same gray-blue eyes. She was short and slight, coming not quite up to his shoulder. Uncle Paul stopped in the midst of his tirade, and looked down upon her as she touched his arm. His passion cooled. Here was indeed a healer of the “nighte's sorrow.”

“Oh, father dear, I wouldn't mind,

she said. "It makes no difference where the school-house stands."

"But it does make a difference that I'm always to be beat by that raskill. There he is now yokin' up his team for the movin'. And there's Hen a-grinnin', the young scamp!"

"Oh, no, father, he isn't! I don't believe Henry would laugh at you. Of course he has to do the moving if his father says so."

"Don't go to standin' up for any o' that crew," and Uncle Paul looked down suspiciously upon her. "Don't have anything to say to that feller! Now, mind, Grace! He's an insinuat' chap, they say, flirtin' with all the girls. But he ain't a-goin' to flirt with my girl."

Grace only laughed and said, "Nobody shall flirt with me but you, father, dear," and she put up her rosy lips for a kiss. "Come now, there's Clover putting her head over the gate and asking to be milked, and I want my milk," and she held up a pink mug, from out which she had drank her morning's draught of milk ever since she was a toddling thing by his side. "You shall milk it full for me yourself, just as you used to."

For three years Grace had been at the academy in the neighbouring town of Bayswater, spending her vacations only at home, except on those occasions when Uncle Paul, hungry for a sight of his darling, had driven over on Saturday and brought her back to stay until Sunday night.

Grace was the very apple of his eye. That she might have an "edification," he endured the loneliness that followed upon her absence. His means were narrow, and to that end he saved and economized. He was not affluent, like Uncle Zadoc. His talent ran rather to the spending than the accumulation of money. This was one of the points of difference between himself and Abigail, who could never be reconciled to the fact that, though they grew no poorer as time went on, they certainly became no richer. Uncle Zadoc was laying by a handsome sum from his lumbering. But Uncle Paul owned little woodland, and, as he frequently pointed out to Abigail, he could not make money out of what he had not got. But she failed to appreciate his logic. That he did not grow rich was a grievance. *Why* he did not was no concern of hers.

To this ill-matched pair Grace had come as a reconciler. Home was a different place when she was in it. She was equally the pride of both their hearts. They hesitated to wrangle when her clear gray eyes looked affectionately from one to the other.

Abigail never failed to pour oil upon the flame of his wrath ; but as he went off for his milking-pails this May morning, with Grace's hand upon his arm, although his hatred for his life-long adversary could not be said to have lessened, it was for the time held in abeyance by his greater love for Grace.

"I'm sorry, Grace, you're keeping our school now," he said. "I wish I'd

let you take the one they offered you at Bayswater. But I couldn't bear to have you go away again. It's been a pretty lonesome three years without you, Gracie. And I thought it 'ud be such a fine thing to have you to home again. But that raskill contrives to spile everything. If the devil don't get *him*, I don't see the use o' havin' any devil." Grace here put her hand upon his mouth. "Well, child, I won't talk any more about that. But don't you have anything to say to that chap, Hen. He's a slippery feller."

The school had already begun, and Grace was the teacher, when the vote was passed to move the school-house. But everything could go on exactly as though it were standing still. So said Uncle Zadoc, who had had experience in that particular branch of business. He had moved not only school-houses, which in that region of country possessed a somewhat peripatetic character, but a shoe-shop wherein seven men were at work. Moving was not the fine art then it has since become, and these were considered prodigious achievements. Now we move an eight-story hotel, with all its people and properties, and think nothing of it.

The children were in high feather at the unusual prospect of a ride in the school-house. Such an experience would transcend any to be found in fairy or giant lore. And they were at the school-house with commendable promptness that morning. Not a tardy mark was entered upon the school register.

The under-pinning was already out, and the door-steps removed. But blocks had been placed, upon which the children had to mount in order to enter. It was not a difficult feat ; but Henry, who was in charge of the business, thought it necessary to come and assist Grace. But before he had reached the door she had leaped lightly up, and was standing there smiling down upon him. For, despite her love for her father, she did not share his feeling about Henry.

She had seen but little of him since they were children and went to the district school together. But that little had made her feel that he was "nice." And he was her cousin. It was hard in Uncle Zadoc to treat her father so, but she had always felt sure she should love Aunt Polly dearly if she had been permitted to know her. The two had met not a half-dozen times in their lives ; but Aunt Polly had watched her grow from childhood to womanhood, and had thought many a time, as she looked over to Uncle Paul's pew in the north-east corner of the old meeting-house, and saw Grace sitting there, that there wasn't a sweeter girl in Mantit. If Providence had vouchsafed her such a daughter, she felt she should have nothing more to desire. And if Henry —, but Aunt Polly never got further than that. Her loyalty to Uncle Zadoc never permitted the vague wish that floated in her mind to take on definite shape. Only she did hope Henry wouldn't take to that bouncing, black-

eyed, saucy Sally Newcome, upon whose prospective acres Uncle Zadoc cast a covetous eye.

"Paul makes a fool of himself over that girl o' his," he remarked at the breakfast-table the morning of the moving. "He's spent hundreds on her eddication that he'd better 'a' put in the bank. They say she's l'arned Latin and can reckon up when an eclipse is comin' or a comit. What's a woman want to know when a comit's comin for? Housekeepin's a woman's business. If she can read her Bible and sign a law dokiment, that's enough. They say Nabby does all the washin' and the heft o' the scrubbin' so's to keep her hands white. She'll make a poor wife for the man that's fool enough to have her."

"Not such a fool either," remarked Henry, heedless of consequences. "She's the prettiest girl in Mantit, and bright's a dollar." Aunt Polly's heart was in her mouth, and she glanced apprehensively at Uncle Zadoc.

"Don't you be puttin' your eye on that girl, Henry. No son o' mine's goin' to marry a pauper. And that's about what Paul's girl will be. That old morgige ain't ever been paid off yet, and the interest is eatin' up the farm. There'll be mighty little left after Nabby's got her thirds, and most likely the Probit Judge would give the whole on't to the widder."

Uncle Zadoc made these somewhat premature post-mortem arrangements with all the decision of the "Probit

Judge" himself, and his under-lip dropped savagely as he looked at Henry over the saucer he was slowly conveying to his mouth. Uncle Zadoc always cooled his tea and coffee in his saucer, and generally managed to deposit a liberal portion on Aunt Polly's carefully laundered table-linen. A small, dull stream was even then dribbling over the edge.

Henry finished his breakfast in silence and then went out to yoke the oxen. He saw Grace as she came out and walked across the green. Her slight, graceful figure stood out against the background of the old gray gambrel-roofed house, a lovely suggestion of youth and springtime. He saw her walk off with her hand on her father's arm.

Henry had inherited enough of his father's temper to at once feel a desire for whatever was denied him. A little opposition acted not only as a spur, but as a suggestion. He might have gone on for ever viewing Grace only as a pretty cousin, had it not been for Uncle Zadoc's remarks. Though that is hardly probable, if there is any truth in the commonly accepted saying that "matches are made in heaven," a somewhat vulgar phrase, and too broad in its application, which should be limited by the prefix "some," but conveying a subtle and important truth.

True marriage seems to be more a recognition than anything else, and that recognition may not come at once. At any rate, although Henry and Grace

had known each other all their lives, it was only at the moment in which he stood looking up at Grace's laughing face framed in the school-house door, that it flashed upon him that here, for him, was the pearl among women.

The school-house was not so very much larger, nor much more unmanageable than a good-sized caravan such as may be seen any day at an English mop or wake, and it was soon in motion. Whenever there was a slight jar, which occurred frequently, Henry felt called upon to come to the door to assure Grace there was nothing to be afraid of. She invariably replied that neither she nor the children had any thought of fear ; they were prepared to enjoy to the utmost every inch of their ride in this novel car—a car that to Henry's fancy bore as precious freight as the dove-drawn car of Aphrodite, of which celebrated vehicle I doubt if he had ever heard.

By recess they had reached Raven Brook, in which the children paddled about and dipped their bare feet, while the car rested, and Henry, seated on the ox-tongue, discoursed to Grace upon the moving, which he declared quite as distasteful to him as it could be to her.

"Hang it!" said Henry ; "I don't care a fig where the school-house stands. It might be in the middle of Turkey Swamp for all me."

"Neither do I," responded Grace ; "though Turkey Swamp would be rather a long walk for me."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that," re-

sponded Henry, smitten with chagrin that he should be supposed forgetful for an instant of Grace's comfort. "But do you think you'll like keeping school, Grace? I should rather grub out stumps from January to December than teach those youngsters their A B, abs, and one, two, threes."

"Oh, I must do something. And perhaps by and by I shall rise; who knows? They want me for an assistant next year at the Bayswater Academy, and then I can give up the A B, abs."

"But you won't want to go away from home again, Grace! What'll your father do without you?" he said, remembering the little scene of which he had been a witness that morning.

"Poor father!" said Grace, softly. "He's spent such a deal of money on me. I must try to pay some of it back. I'm afraid father hasn't got much money laid up for his old age, Henry."

"I wish," burst out Henry, irrelevantly, "my father would let him alone. Hang it all! Why need they keep quarrelling all the time like two old turkey-cocks? Why can't they live in peace?"

"Well, I'm sure nobody wishes it more than I," said Grace, and she stepped back to look at the clock and touch the bell for the close of recess.

"In with you, youngsters!" shouted Henry; "we're going to start up." And Uncle Zadoc, who was watching things from his door-yard, with suspicion in his soul, thought it was time.

At Perkin's Bridge, which was a

primitive stone arrangement over a narrow brook consisting chiefly of mud, one wheel sunk nearly to the hub, tilting the school-house threateningly. It was already noon, and school was abruptly dismissed until the wheel could be prized out. This was accomplished in time for the afternoon session, but progress was slow, and the school-house had to put up for the night opposite the parsonage, through the door-yard of which any chance vehicle might make the necessary detour.

But we will not follow it any further on its journey. Suffice it to say that a lucky break in the tackling—lucky from Henry's point of view—so delayed its progress, that it was not until noon of the third day that it came to its final resting-place on the spot selected by Uncle Zadoc.

"Though it's hardly worth while, Henry," said Grace, laughing mischievously, "to take it off the wheels, for father is already moving heaven and earth to have it put back again, and Isaac Miller and Peleg White"—two fathers of families on the extreme western verge of the district—"have said they would vote to have it done."

"Oh, hang it!" exclaimed Henry; and then upon second thought added, "Well, I wouldn't mind hitching on and going back again to-morrow, Grace. They might keep it going all summer like the shuttle in Granny Treddle's loom, and I shouldn't care."

"And I'm sure the children wouldn't," replied Grace, blushing rosy-red.

For by this time the two were in love, to use the common phrase, and both had also discovered that they had had a special regard for each other from some unknown early period. Neither, however, imparted this discovery to the other—at least, not by word of mouth. But henceforth it became the business of Henry's life, other pursuits being but side issues, to contrive meetings with Grace, visits at Uncle Paul's house being, of course, out of the question.

This was not a difficult matter. There were brief but sweet greetings by the wayside. The somewhat more prolonged interviews when he walked home by her side from the Sunday evening prayer-meeting, to which all the young people went, as it did not commit them to anything in particular as the Thursday evening prayer-meeting did. To the latter nobody but church-members thought of going. To do so would indicate that one was "under conviction," if not converted, and had consequently made up his or her mind to dance no more, and never again to yield to the seductions of whist. And very few of the young folks of Mantit were up to that sacrifice.

Then there was the 4th of July picnic in the woods behind the meeting-house, which afforded excellent opportunities for strolling in secluded paths, especially during the speech-making which followed close upon the feasting.

And above all there was the great County Cattle Show held annually at Bayswater, to which everybody came

from far and near. The county of Baymouth had not then its present mammoth building that houses all exhibits under one roof; but these were scattered about the village, some in the town-house, others in the academy hall, while the ploughing matches and trials of carriage and dray horses were half a mile away. An observant mind can at once see that here was every opportunity for the meeting of lovers kept apart by paternal perversity.

During the latter part of the day Henry and Grace strolled into one of the recitation rooms of the academy, that in which Grace had been drilled in mathematics and the discovery of "comits" during her academical days. Any one looking in upon them would have come to the conclusion that the subject of their conversation was one of absorbing interest. It was. Henry, who had already declared himself, whether at the 4th of July picnic, or that very day while ostensibly inspecting the agricultural products, I have had no opportunity of knowing, was urging their immediate marriage on Grace. That the father of neither would ever consent they both knew. But Henry had confided in his mother, and told her his plan, which she had approved; with tears and tuggings at the heart-strings, it is true. But she had approved, and had told him to tell Grace that she had.

His plan was this. A company of emigrants was just on the point of starting from a neighbouring State for

Michigan. Among them were some distant cousins of Aunt Polly's. He and Grace could go to them, be married there, and join the emigrant train.

To say that Grace shrunk at first from any consideration even of this plan is only to do her simple justice. To say that little by little she yielded to Henry's pleadings is only to say that she was a woman, and loved him. But that she would not have consented had his mother disapproved is true. And she weighted her consent with the provision that her mother also must know and approve.

Abigail did approve. She liked Henry; and she had strong hopes, based upon her knowledge of both Uncle Zadoc and Uncle Paul, that the emigrant scheme would prove to be only a somewhat prolonged bridal trip. She was sure she should yet see the two installed on the old farm. And it gave her pleasure, unalloyed pleasure, to circumvent Uncle Paul. Abigail, as one can plainly see, was not a wife after the Preacher's heart. She gave her consent with cheerful alacrity.

Meantime a school meeting had been called, and Uncle Paul's faction had voted by a majority of two to restore the school-house to its former site. Uncle Zadoc had refused to move it, or even to lend his oxen and tackling for that purpose, and an inexperienced member of the opposing party had undertaken the job. He had failed ignominiously. Just as the school-house arrived at Perkin's Bridge some of the

tackling gave way simultaneously with the collapse of one end of the primitive stone arch, and when Henry and Grace drove from Mantit in Si Palmer's close-covered waggon, the last thing they saw through the back window of that vehicle was the Car of Love, leaning tipsily over the embankment, and threatening an entire somersault into the ditch.

Uncle Paul and Uncle Zadoc, so it was concerted between Aunt Polly and Abigail, were not to be informed of their flight until the next morning.

"Where's Henry?" asked Uncle Zadoc at the breakfast-table. "I don't know what's got into him lately. He's never round when he's wanted."

Aunt Polly made no reply.

"He's up, I s'pose? But now I come to think on't I ain't seen him this morning. Is he sick?"

Aunt Polly still remaining silent, he looked up. Tears were running down her cheeks. As she caught his eye she burst out—

"Oh, father, how can you be so hard? I'm sure it'll kill me havin' Henry go 'way off to Michigan. And I had lotted so on always havin' him and seein' his child'en grow up. And there ain't a sweeter girl in Mantit than Grace if she *is* Paul's daughter. And I don't see why you need to be quarrellin', quarrellin' the whole durin' time. It's a shame and a disgrace, you two old men, with your hair gray, and totterin' on the verge o' the grave. Oh, it'll break my heart, I know it will, to lose

my only son in my old age, and never see him ag'in. Oh, father, how can you be so cruel?"

To say that Uncle Zadoc was surprised at this outbreak is to say little. He was confounded, and, for the moment, speechless. Never in all the years of their married life had Aunt Polly spoken to him in that tone. And what did she mean about Henry going to Michigan? And what had Paul's daughter to do with it? He laid down his knife and fork and looked at her. He reflected. At last he spoke.

"Has Henry gone off to Michigan? and is he goin' to marry Grace?" he asked.

"Yes, he's gone," sobbed Aunt Polly; "and he and Grace'll be married to-day, and I sha'n't see 'em. Oh, dear! Henry'll be married, and I sha'n't be there! Oh, father, you're a dreadful hard man!"

This was not to be borne. Uncle Zadoc got up from the table and walked round to Aunt Polly's side. He laid his great knotted hand upon her white cap.

"Polly," he said, "if you'll only jest stop speakin' to me that way, I'll do anything you want me to. I'll tackle up and start right off and fetch 'em back, and I won't say a word to 'em. And they shall come and live here."

"Oh, father, I take it all back!" cried Aunt Polly. "I didn't mean it; you've always been good to me. But it makes me 'most crazy to think o' Henry's goin' 'way off to Michigan. I can't abear it. And you'll love Grace, I

know you will, father. Yes, father, I'll go and tell Joe to tackle right up. And then I'll lay out your Sunday clothes, and help you get ready. You've always been good to me, father."

And so Uncle Zadoc found himself at the end of a brief hour behind his swift white-eyed racker in pursuit of the run-aways, having had from Aunt Polly all the particulars concerning their destination.

A—I was going to say, similar scene was taking place at about the same time at Uncle Paul's breakfast-table. It was a scene, but it was not a similar one.

"Where's Grace?" asked Uncle Paul, as he dissected a Taunton herring on the dish before him. "Here's a hard roe ; Grace always likes the roe."

"Grace is on her way to Michigan," replied Abigail, grimly.

"Michigan!" ejaculated Uncle Paul.

"Yes ; she and nephew Henry went off yesterday. They're goin' to be married to-day, and settle in Michigan." Abigail's voice had a triumphal ring in it. She experienced a fine sense of victory.

Uncle Paul strove vainly to speak. His face flushed and was convulsed, and Abigail had a momentary fear that he was going to have "a fit"—so she told Polly when the two met that day to compare notes and exchange congratulations. But speech came to his relief.

"And you knew it and didn't tell me!" he said, slowly. "Well, Nabby—you're her mother, and I won't say what

I think. But perhaps you'll tell me how they're goin'."

"They're goin' to jine a company from Tiverton, Rhode Island. They're goin' with some o' Polly's folks there," replied Abigail, somewhat disappointed that he took it so quietly. She had expected an outbreak little short of an earthquake.

Uncle Paul made no reply. He got up from the table, took down his Sunday overcoat and hat from their nails in the entry, and went out. He harnessed his old mare, whose utmost speed was five miles an hour, and drove off. Abigail observed that he kept on his barn shoes, which were plentifully besprinkled with milk from the milking. But she thought it best to say nothing to him about them, or the overalls of blue denim, which he also failed to lay aside. She watched him with a grim smile as he drove out of the door-yard. She had seen Uncle Zadoc drive off just before they sat down to breakfast. She foresaw that the bridal trip would be briefer than even she had thought.

It was not in her to divine Uncle Paul's feelings. He was deeply wounded at Grace's defection. It pierced his heart that she should have left him without a word.

"I'd 'a' done anything for her. I'd 'a' took to that young raskill if she'd only told me she wanted me to. Oh, my little girl! you don't know your old father yet. He's a quarrelsome and headstrong old chap, but he'd 'a' done anything for you. I'd 'a' gi'n up about

the school-house"—he was just passing that apparently intoxicated building by a temporary track through the adjoining meadow—"I'd never say another word ag'in Zadoc. I'd forgive—yes, I'd forgive Nabby. Oh, my little girl, if you'll only come back I'll do anything—*anything!*"

Such were his reflections as he urged the old mare to her utmost speed, in a fever of anxiety lest he should be too late, for Abigail had not thought fit to tell him that the emigrants would not begin their journey for several days. And it was much this that he said to Grace, when, after a toilsome drive, he arrived three hours after Uncle Zadoc, and she ran out to greet him, and threw her arms around his neck.

The four returned to Mantit the next day, Henry and Grace in the high-top chaise behind the white-eyed racker, and Uncle Zadoc and Uncle Paul in the latter's ramshackle old buggy. What passed between these last two in their slow progress homeward never transpired. They told no one, and Polly's wisdom and Abigail's prudence alike restrained them from asking. But from that time Uncle Paul ceased to dance and explode on his green, and it was some time before the neighbourhood became accustomed to this vacuum in the daily routine.

The very next day the whole district turned out and lifted the school-house from its disreputable plight, and set it upon a spot exactly half way between the contested sites. And there it stands to this day.

*THE COURAGEOUS ACTION
OF LUCIA RICHMOND.*





THE COURAGEOUS ACTION OF LUCIA RICHMOND.

*(Manuscript found in a chest in the
garret over the left wing of the old
Richmond House.)*



WHEN my dear Miss Silence died I was twenty, and it was then that I went back to the old house whence she took me, when I was two years old, from my dying mother's arms.

Miss Silence was my mother's old teacher and her dearest friend. For sixty years she taught school, and had made pens enough in that time, she herself said, to have written all the books in the English language. She had such a knack at a nib, soft but not too soft, fine but not too fine, that even Priest Ransom and Squire Amasa used to send in their quills for her to make. And this they would not have condescended to do to

another woman in the parish, and not to Miss Silence if she had not been a maid ; for the priest taught and the 'squire believed that a married woman should be in subjection to her husband, and it would be unbecoming in her to set up to make so much as a quill pen on her own responsibility.

Miss Silence kept a school for girls, for girls were not taught at the public expense. To do that would have been considered a waste of money ; yea, more than a waste, for it would have been putting woman where God in His providence had not intended her to be put. Priest Ransom's own mother could only make her mark, and he considered learning a dangerous thing for a woman to meddle with. A woman if she wanted to know anything must ask her husband. And if she had no husband, as is the misfortune of many women, why, there was always the minister of the parish, whose solemn duty it was to look after the weaklings of his flock.

Miss Silence herself was a learned woman. That Priest Ransom admitted. She was taught by her father, who had no son. He was a minister, and fitted young men for college in his family. Miss Silence, who had a great hunger for learning, as happens to a woman now and then, got her first taste of it from overhearing the young men recite their lessons ; afterwards she studied these lessons privately, as a thing to be ashamed of, for so it was considered. But one day her father coming in and finding her so absorbed that she did

not answer when spoken to, and wondering much if it could be her sampler which she had been at work on for two years and had not finished, she hated it so, he came up behind and looked over her shoulder, and lo ! she was reading the Greek Sophocles in a low voice to herself, the words dropping from her lips sweet and clear as the honey of Hymettus.

He was so surprised that he could not speak for some moments. Miss Silence's first thought was to clap the book behind her. Then she stood up proudly and confessed what she had done, and that she could read Latin as well as Greek and knew her Euclid. When he saw how eager she was he did not chide her as she had feared and expected he would, but he patted her head gently and said : " Is it indeed so, my little maid ? Are you too longing to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil ? Well, so be it. It is like thy own dear mother before thee." And after that he taught her as he would a son.

Such was her learning, indeed, that it was whispered about that Priest Ransom had once consulted her concerning a doubtful passage in the Greek Testament. It was only a surmise, for no one durst ask him whether it was so. The entire town stood in wholesome awe of him, as they should of one of God's anointed ministers ; and we young women always stood to one side and dropped our deepest courtesies when we met him, which he acknowledged or not as he pleased.

Miss Silence did not instruct the girls of her school in Greek. Even she thought that such knowledge as that was too much for all but the select among women. But happily for me, she looked upon me—whether worthily so or not is not for me to say—as one of the select women vouchsafed by Providence to our generation, and taught me all that I was capable of receiving. For, to her lasting regret, I never took to Greek.

You have asked me, my dear daughter, to write it all out for you how I laid the ghost, and you may think I have wandered far from my subject in what I have been telling you, and that all this can have no connection whatever with that remarkable experience. But it seems to me necessary to a true understanding of my action that you should know under what influences I was bred—that you should know something concerning my dear Miss Silence, without whose teaching and example I am sure I should never have had the courage and presence of mind to do what I did.

I am, as you know, through my mother and grandmother Sturtevant, a lineal descendant of Captain Benjamin Church, the Indian fighter—as brave a man as ever trod shoe-leather or carried a musket. My mother and my grandmother before me were fearless women, and stood in no awe even of an Indian in his war paint; though always ready to give him the go-by when it could be done, thinking that true courage is not bravado or foolhardiness, but the stand-

ing up to a thing when you see you must and it is right.

So by right of inheritance I was never a coward, and as I grew up never flinched at danger, not even when 'Squire Amasa's great Scotch bull came at me when I was thirteen years old, with his ugly head lowered and his sharp horns pointed and his eyes like live coals. But I stood to meet him, and off with my striped blanket and threw it over his head when he was two feet off, and so had time to climb the great oak in the Ridge pasture.

Miss Silence always said that courage like that by inheritance was not the kind to be justly proud of; that it was good to have strong nerves and a heart that beats regularly no matter what happened, but it was better to have a courage grounded upon reason; and that women especially made themselves weak by believing in all sorts of signs and superstitions—such as the fork falling and sticking into the floor, which was a stranger coming; or a snuff in the candle, which was a coffin.

But Priest Ransom encouraged his wife in these superstitions, for he liked to see women live up to his ideas of them.

Yet Miss Silence did not disbelieve in ghosts, though she said they walked a good deal less than folks thought. She said she believed with *Prince Hamlet* in Mr. Shakspeare's play:

"I do not set my life at a pin's fee;
And, for my soul, what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself?"

She said that *Prince Hamlet* acted like a reasonable being—though some folks do say now he was crazy—and as a dutiful son should. She would not be a mite afraid herself to meet her father's ghost any time of day or night; though it was not a thing likely to happen to a God-fearing Hopkinsian minister, whose flesh was resting in hope, to be condemned to wander nights and to spend his days in purgatory, seeing that he never believed in purgatory.

But it is possible that Miss Silence might have entertained a different opinion concerning a ghost with no body at all. Of that, however, I cannot speak with knowledge, never having heard her give her opinion thereupon. To my own mind it is a much more fearsome thing to hear the footsteps of a being you cannot see than to look upon the most direful shape a restless spirit ever took on. Such we read was the experience of Eliphaz the Temanite, the hair of whose flesh stood up and the very bones within him did shake when a spirit breathed upon his face and he could not discern any appearance thereof. Such a formless ghost it was that haunted the house wherein had dwelt my ancestors even to the fourth generation.

The ghost that walked in that old ancestral home was that of a young girl, my father's only sister, who had taken her own life by violence when she was eighteen years old. Her father (and my grandfather) was a man of high spirit, proud of his ancestry, proud of

his social eminence, proud of his inherited wealth, which had not been acquired through trade, but which at his death was found to have melted away like a late snow under an April sun. He was kind and even generous to those below him in the social scale so long as they kept their places, but hard towards any who wished to rise, as it is right and proper for men to do in our free Republic. And when a poor young man, the son of a blacksmith, fell in love with his only daughter and she with him, he had nothing but scorn and deep anger for that love. And though the young man was a good young man and of excellent promise, of a superior mind and a scholar, he would not hear of their marriage.

Such however was the girl's resolution and iron will, being the true daughter of her father, that she would have married her lover in spite of him. But one day he came to her with tales to her lover's discredit, and he brought such proofs of his unfaithfulness to her that it was not in human reason to doubt. She wrote him a bitter letter of dismissal, and only two days after he was thrown from his horse and killed. Then it came out that the tales were false, and that they were the work of one who would fain have married this young girl, and one whom her father favoured. The truth coming to her ears she went raving mad, and getting away from her watchers while they slept, she hanged herself at eleven o'clock of the night in the high and

wide garret over the left wing. The rope broke and she fell, but she was quite dead when the watchers, having awakened from their sleep, sought and found her.

It was not long before her father followed her to the grave, his iron will at last broken, and mourning as one without hope for her who when alive in her young beauty had been the very light of his eyes and pride of his heart. Then my mother, who had lived in the house ever after her marriage to my father, died also, and the house was shut up and no one could be induced to live in it. For even before my mother's death—yea, even before that of my grandfather, so my mother told Miss Silence—the ghost had begun to walk, coming in with soft-falling footsteps at eleven o'clock of the night, void and without shape, and going slowly up the stairs to the high, wide garret, of which at its approach the door swung open without touch of mortal fingers. The fearful listeners below would hear a heavy chest dragged, just as the poor mad creature had dragged it in her frenzy, up under the piece of rope that hung fastened from the staple in the wall, and then after another moment of horror would be heard the falling of the body, followed by the soft-falling footsteps descending the stairs.

When my dear Miss Silence died I was, as it were, turned out of doors, though she fain would have bequeathed to me the small but endeared house in which the greater part of my life had

been spent within the shelter of her love. But she had only a life interest in the dwelling and its furniture, as is commonly the case with women, who are thought hardly fit to be trusted with the use of property during life, much less with the disposal of it by will at death. So there was nothing for me to do but to go back to the old house which had fallen to me by inheritance, and whence she had taken me from my dying mother's arms.

On the tenth morning after she had been laid to rest in her grave on the hill Silas Crowde carried me, my chests of blankets and household linen of my own spinning and weaving—some of the tablecloths and towels being woven in a thistle pattern of Miss Silence's own devising, the rest being in the snow-drop, which has ever been a favourite in our family—my box of clothing, my pewter, my mother's china, which had been kept in store for me, my bed of live-geese feathers, and my books over to Parting Ways, where the old house stood and still stands, back from the highway, with only one other house in sight, the village being hidden by a turn in the road and a thick pine wood.

It is true that the women of Trip-hammer, where Miss Silence had lived, remonstrated with me for my headiness in going back to the haunted house, and Mrs. Ransom even said that it was a bearding of Providence, which, if persisted in would most likely and rightly bring down upon my head a fearful judgment and condemnation.

"But what else can I do?" I was fain to ask at last, though more out of defence than from any notion of acting upon the advice of these women who had assembled in Miss Silence's keeping-room the day before my departure to inquire into my concerns, to offer vain counsel, and to drink for the last time of Miss Silence's tea, famous for its strength and staying qualities, and of which a few drawings still remained in the bottom of the blue and gilt tea-caddy.

Not one of them spoke in answer to my question, but went on sipping their tea with loud sips, and casting their eyes down into their cups, being in that condition of mind women-folks are apt to be in when brought up short from their ramblings by a pointed question. Then they looked each at the others, and Mrs. Ransom spoke first, as belonged to her by right to do, seeing she was Priest Ransom's wife and so the first woman in the parish.

"To my mind," she said, "it's a sight properer and more in agreement to scriptur' and the teachin's of the 'postle Paul for a young maid to marry than to go away by herself and live all alone in a house. And it's contrary to natur' as well as scriptur', women bein' the weaker vessel, and so to be keered for." She paused here, but no one spoke, and she again took up the thread of her discourse. "There's Cyrus Martin. His wife Sarah Jane has been dead nigh on to eight months, and him with five small child'en, and 'leven cows, and no-

body to do a stroke o' work except for wages. He'd be tickled enough to have y'. And he's a good provider,—a leetle close, mebbe,—and you'll have a good home, and a husband to cherish y', and split yer kindlin's, and fetch in water, and hang out your clo'es when it rains. He was dretful good to Sarah Jane, and he'd only have to be spoke to to think on't. He's be'n lookin' round. But law ! I don't s'pose he ever thought o' you, a-livin' so with Miss Silence, and she feelin' so superior, bein' a minister's darter and havin' an edication. But 'tain't safe to look too high, and every woman can't marry a minister or doctor or even a store-keeper. And a good likely farmer with means ain't to be despised. And what Miss Silence left y' in the bank will come handy to buy that medder land Cyrus has be'n wantin', and——”

“Don't y' never let that money go to buy medder land for the best man that ever breathed. That's my advice to y'.” It was Mrs. Silas Crowde who was speaking. She had come in just as Mrs. Ransom was beginning her discourse, and had been waiting for her to end. But seeing no prospect thereto she now burst in without further ceremony. “Men are human bein's, the best on 'em, with sights o' human natur'. And the minute they get their clutch on to your money it's gone and you'll never have any good on't. I know all about it. I married Silas Crowde and brought him a dowry of a hund'ed acres o' woodland, good pine and oak timber

for ship-buildin'. And he's made sights o' money out on't, and not a cent of it is mine, nor never will be. And I've be'n a faithful, hard-workin' wife to him, if I do say it. He's made his will and give the heft on't to his son by his fust wife. And he's goin' to leave our Mahala two hund'ed dollars, and myself 'll have the widder's thirds and that's all. And Silas is as good's they'll av'ridge. No, Lucia Richmond, as long's the marriage laws are what they be and give a woman up to her husband, soul and body and property, you'd better go and live with ghosts enough sight and take your chance, and——"

But here, sick at heart, I stole away and left them to settle it among themselves, and went and sat down in the chair in my dear Miss Silence's bedroom where she used to sit and talk with me in tender, serious, motherly fashion ; and I am not ashamed to confess that I cried heartily, and kissed the chair and the pillows of her bed.

It was the latter part of December, a showery day, that Silas Crowde took me home ; for so I began to call it then, and have continued to do ever since. The old house was damp and the furniture fallen much awry, and the spiders, its sole occupants through all these years, had spun their webs across doors and windows. We went from room to room, and I fixed upon the south-east room and the bedroom above it as being the most habitable, and in them Silas set my goods. He cut up the fallen branches with which the ground around

the house was thickly strewn, and built a noble fire in each fireplace, which blazed and crackled in a truly enlivening manner.

When he had gone I hung the tea-kettle to boil on the crane in the lower room, and then went out on the upper porch to look about me a little, for the sun had broken through the clouds and was making a glorious setting. I opened the door leading from the upper hall with difficulty, owing to its long disuse. I watched Silas down the long avenue of Lombardy poplars till he was out of sight. I experienced a feeling of pleasure at being thus left alone. Silas had gone away expressing great pity for me, of which, however, I did not feel the need—not so far as living in the old house was concerned. For I cared nothing for the ghost, knowing of it only by hearsay, and that so little that I had fallen into a disbelief of it. I was filled with pleasure only at having a house all my own and to myself, since I could no longer be with my dear Miss Silence. For I was always of a reserved nature, like my revered father, who had died in the East Indies before my birth, and cared for but few, and would always rather be alone if I could not have the company I enjoyed.

I lingered a long time on the porch, sitting upon its stout balustrade. I have been all my life a lover of the curious and secret ways of nature, and I observed, as I had often done before, how the leaves of the great elm, the branches whereof swept the porch floor,

were evenly wet with moisture, while those of the locusts held theirs in the form of drops, like living jewels, which at the lightest touch of breeze or finger dropped sparkling to the grass below, leaving them as dry as in the heat of a summer's day.

The clouds in great thunder-heads fled into the east before the rays of the parting sun. A few lingered in his light and were changed to gold or a delicate pink, like the pink of the sweet-brier rose. The open sky, by reason of contrast with those clouds of pink and gold, was a most pellucid blue, and in its azure depths they floated in security, an emblem, I could but think, of the souls that dwell in the deeps of God's love, of which this fathomless sky was only a faint and feeble type.

As the night drew on I went in, fastened the outer doors, and closed the shutters of the upper room. I then drew up to the fire the round, light stand, whereon I placed a candle of my own moulding from the small store I had brought, and then drank my tea, which I have all my life considered the most comfortable and comforting of beverages. I then read aloud the ninety-first Psalm, which my dear Miss Silence called her "staff," and, following her instructions of "early to bed and early to rise," covered up the embers, climbed into the curtained bed in the corner, and so under the refuge of His wings laid me down and slept in peace, and was awakened by the sun, once more in the east and sending his

earliest beams through the heart-shaped openings in the tops of the shutters.

All the next morning I was pleasantly busied in putting my household goods in place, looking into every cranny in the house, and in the afternoon walking in the old garden in its almost obliterated paths and amid its wild tangles of box, lilac, sweet-brier, and Southern bush. So, perhaps, it was because of over-fatigue that I did not readily fall asleep that night, but lay tossing behind the heavy curtains. The embers flamed up from their ashes and died out just as the clock in the room below struck the hour of eleven. I was then sinking into a gentle doze when I was aroused by the sound of soft-falling footsteps, heard distinctly through the partition which separated my bedchamber from the staircase leading to the high, wide garret in the left wing. I was half asleep and half awake, in that inexplicable state which is neither the one nor the other, and in which the most grotesque as well as the most rational thoughts seem to have equal place. This condition of mind, which lasted perhaps a few seconds, though seemingly of much longer duration, suddenly gave way to a mortal terror, which seized upon me and brought me sitting up in bed, holding the curtains down with a frenzied clutch, and saying to myself, "The ghost!" while I shivered in every nerve of my body. Had the footsteps hesitated one instant at my door I know I should have shrieked aloud, so entirely had I lost control of

my powers, both mental and physical. But they did not pause. They went on with that soft measured pace such as characterizes no mortal footsteps. I heard the dragging of the chest, the falling of the body, the footsteps descending, and then I aroused from my irrational terror. I sprang out of bed and piled the branches of pine upon the coals until they roared in a vast flame up the chimney and lighted every corner of the room like noonday. For I have ever found that light scatters quickly the phantoms that people the darkness. Then, after again commending myself to that Being who holds all the powers of the supernatural as well as the natural world in His keeping, I fell asleep.

The next day I meditated much and deeply upon my situation. This was my home. I had none other in all the wide world, neither did I wish to have. It was the home of my forefathers, and as such I loved it. Its time-stained walls were inexpressibly dear to me. Within them my mother had passed the few brief years of her married life. Here she had given birth to me, and from here she had passed into eternity. In this house I felt I must remain. Not for even a brief moment could I bring myself to entertain the idea of giving it up. Of the ghost I, of a truth, was not really afraid; at least, not when wide awake and in full possession of my powers of mind. Should I then suffer it to drive me hence when under the spell of half-waking visions, themselves spectres

of the imagination such as my dear Miss Silence would have scouted? No, I answered; I would remain. But, I further reflected, it would be necessary to guard against the possibility of being again overtaken by such mortal though causeless terror as was that of the previous night. Therefore I resolved to meet the ghost only when wide awake.

So that night I did not go to bed at my usual hour of nine, but sat up, and as the hour of eleven drew nigh I heaped the wood high upon the fire, and drew up a large old chair to that corner of the hearth opposite the one wherein I sat with my knitting. As the clock struck the last note of the hour I heard the soft-falling footsteps ascending the stairs. I breathed a brief prayer for help and guidance, feeling of a surety that these would be vouchsafed me in this that I had determined upon doing, and then, hastening to the door opening upon the staircase that led up into the high, wide garret of the left wing, I threw it wide open.

The cheerful gleam of the firelight fell out upon the landing in a broad square. As the steps drew nigh I spoke. "Enter, poor wandering spirit," I said, "and stay your weary footsteps in the home of a friend."

For a brief space, as a bird might lift its wing, or a minnow dart for its prey through the sunny shallows of Stony Brook, the footsteps stayed in their course at my door, and then passed on, going softly yet resolutely up the oaken staircase, the door of the garret swing-

ing noiselessly open at their approach. I did not close the door. I stood and held it open while I listened to the dragging of the chest, the fall of the body, and the footsteps descending. As they crossed the square of firelight no shadow fell thereon, and as they ceased below I shut my door. I was calm, and not a tremor shook my nerves. I went to bed and slept until the cock's clarion announced the approach of another day.

The next night at the coming of the footsteps I again spoke, and with greater urgency. "Why will you not enter, poor wandering spirit," I said, "and stay your weary footsteps in the chamber of a friend?"

As these words of invitation fell from my lips again did the footsteps pause at my door an almost imperceptible instant. Then they entered, and I closed it.

"Sit here," I said; and I pointed to the large old chair which I had drawn up, as before, in the corner of the hearth opposite my own. I spoke in my own tongue, which was also that of her whose ghost I addressed. For though Priest Ransom had ever affirmed and insisted that the spirits of the dead spake in Hebrew alone, that being the language of Jehovah's chosen people and of His covenants and commandments, yet my dear Miss Silence would never admit it as at all probable, seeing the New Testament was writ in Greek, and that the Gentiles were coming from the East and the West to sit down in His

kingdom. It was far more probable, she said, that the gift of tongues would be conferred upon His redeemed, as was done at the Pentecost spoken of in the Acts. As for myself I have never cared for or concerned myself in these speculations, ever feeling that the language we shall speak in those high countries is of little moment so long as we sojourn here, and that our intellects should be exercised chiefly in striving so to live that when the time comes for us to take our departure thence we may do so with rejoicing and enter in with gladness.

So, as I said, I spake to the ghost in my own tongue, and the soft-falling footsteps passed over the space between the door and the hearth and ceased beside the chair.

I sat down in my own chair and took up my knitting. I have been in many singular as well as startling circumstances during my long and eventful life, but in none so strange as this. Before me stood the great old chair, empty to all appearance and void. But I knew that from it ghostly eyes were regarding me. What should I say? How was I to talk to empty space, with neither answering eye nor listening ear?

As I went on narrowing the heel of my stocking I revolved and cast about these questions in my mind. And then I remembered that this was the ghost of a young girl of nearly my own age. I do not know whether ghosts count their age by years, or whether they

grow old at all in the sense that we do, or merely exist in that eternity which we are taught has no beginning nor end, and therefore no space such as we call time. I did not and do not attempt to solve these questions ; for it has ever been my belief that it is not well to try with too great persistence to penetrate mysteries hidden from us for some all-wise purpose.

But my predominant desire was to console ; and though I had not then met with my own beloved Richard, whose death in the very prime of his days has cast a shadow along the whole course of my life which will fade only into the light of that eternal day into which I am soon to enter, having very nearly lived out my appointed time, and which has taught me that love hath its anguish as well as its bliss, I reflected that she was only an undisciplined girl when she committed the sad deed of taking her own life, and that it might perchance soothe her restless spirit to know that another girl felt for her, and could in some measure comprehend what her feelings must have been when she recalled to her mind, after her lover's sudden and violent death, her disbelief in his integrity, and the bitter letter she had written him.

So I told her that I knew her story, and how much I pitied her, and how I felt that the Infinite Goodness must pity her much more, knowing so much better than I her sorrow and her provocation, though she had been condemned thus to wander and to live over nightly for

so many years that scene of violence. And I told her that I would ask the Infinite Goodness to give her rest, feeling I could do so, justly yet humbly, since the Divine example of our Lord, who, His apostle tells us, preached to the spirits in prison, even the unrepentant dead.

As I finished speaking, the nightly period of her wandering having expired, the footsteps passed out, the door, untouched by mortal fingers, swinging wide open upon its hinges.

The next night she came, and the next and the next. But I soon ceased talking to her, beyond the friendly welcome which I always gave her. For I was put to it for fit subjects of conversation, feeling that her interests could not be of that earthly nature that such subjects as the weather, which we human beings in the flesh find so inexhaustible, could be of interest, since to a disembodied spirit heat and cold, storm and sunshine, must be alike indifferent.

But having through Miss Silence's example and teaching, and my own inherited taste, a great love of reading, and always having found it a never-failing spring of comfort amid adverse circumstances, I resolved to read to her: and this I did night after night—wise sayings of the great and good Dr. Johnson (for I feel that he deserves these epithets, despite his hotly expressed condemnation of the attitude of our States during our late severe but triumphant struggle with the mother

country) ; Mr. Milton's "L'Allegro," which I chose as more enlivening than his "Il Penseroso," as also his sonnet concerning his dead wife who came back to him like Alcestis from the grave ; well-polished similes like sparkling and radiant gems from my beloved Jeremy Taylor ; and the wisdom that exudes like the first droppings of the honeycomb from the pages of the saintly Leighton.

I read to her also from the works of the godly Mr. Baxter, more especially those parts wherein he discourseth so sweetly concerning the rest that remaineth, nor did I pass by Mr. Bunyan's fight with Apollyon in the "Pilgrim's Progress," which, I reflected, might give her strength were she too struggling with an evil power. But I did pass by in all these writers their profound theological disquisitions and speculations, which I have ever found difficult of digestion by my weak, illogical, woman's intellect, and which have always seemed to me, of lofty and wonderful proportions though they be, as something altogether separate from saving faith, and ill suited for the binding up of a wounded spirit.

I also read to her some pages of Dr. Swift's letters to Stella, which to some might seem a singular choice, but which are so filled and penetrated by the tender spirit of love, I could but think they would sound like breathings of heavenly music even to ghostly ears.

Of my Shakspeare, however, I read but little, ever having been of the

opinion that he is not to be taken in detached sips, a taste here and a taste there, as from a cup that hath a bottom, but in long, deep draughts, as a thirsty man drinks from a pellucid and never-failing spring. So I read to her only those sonnets of my Shakspeare wherein he speaks so wisely and understandingly of love—the theme methought best suited to a spirit's hearing.

I read to her too from the sacred and holy Book, fit for all ears, whether spiritual or natural, the Divine sayings of our blessed Lord, which of a surety must bring comfort to the most despairing soul in the extremest limits of His universe.

For thirteen nights she came thus, but on the fourteenth it was borne in upon me that my ghostly friend was about to depart never more to return. For I had come to regard her as a friend, listening for her nightly footsteps as for those of one well beloved and much desired. I told her this, and of my sorrow at her approaching departure, though I could but rejoice, as must she, that her wanderings were to end. I further said that I had a great and engrossing desire to look upon her with my natural eyes. And since she had the power to make her presence known by the soft-falling footsteps, could she not by a still greater exercise of that power permit me to behold the body wherein she dwelt, the shape a spirit takes on when released from the bondage of the natural body?

I then paused, with my eyes fixed

attentively upon the chair wherein she sat. Soon I perceived something like a mantle of the filmiest gauze, more perhaps like unto the dew-filled webs of a summer's morning, lying upon the chair. The shadowy yet shining folds thereof fell over the arms, touching the floor here and there as does a maiden's gown when she sits. It was mist, and yet it was not mist. We are wont to consider the haze that hangs in the atmosphere on an early day in spring, or that clings around the tops of distant hills, a most delicate and ethereal substance. But this was still more delicate and elusive. It was more like the spirit that dwells in that mist than the mist itself. My pen struggles to convey to you, my daughter, any adequate idea of this that I saw. Pen and words are impotent to do so. And as the soft-falling footsteps receded it melted into nothingness and was gone.

The next night I again expressed the same desire ; and I said that now, my natural vision having been able to grasp that shadowy outline, perhaps it might be vouchsafed me to see her in still more tangible shape. And I entreated her, if it were in her power, thus to manifest herself to me.

Having thus spake I waited, and again the shining, shadowy folds of mist fell over the chair. Slowly they took shape—a shape like to that of the human body, but with outlines of more surpassing grace. The hands were held in a gentle clasp of rest and repose. The shape of the throat was

there, with tender shadows lying under the curve of the chin, and something like fine threads of hair fell away from a rounded outline of brow. And from under the rounded outline of brow the eyes looked forth, truly the most astonishing a human being was ever permitted to gaze into, large, pure, and unfathomable; within their depths dwelt peace—peace unutterable; and love—love unquenchable.

Long I gazed, until the vision faded and the soft-falling footsteps receded and I was left alone, though I fain would have followed, charmed out of myself and from all desire of remaining by the power of those most beautiful and holy eyes.

But the ability to follow seemed to be denied me, and I sat by the dead embers far into the night, as one bereft and alone. So I continued to feel as the days passed and the nights came and went and my young kinswoman returned no more. But as I reflected in these hours of my loneliness on all that had passed, and how through the Divine Goodness it had been vouchsafed me to lead her perturbed spirit away from this scene of her sin and sorrow, even as I reflected a great peace and content fell upon me as of a parting benediction, and took possession of all my days and ruled my nights.

A MIDDLE-AGED COMEDY.





A MIDDLE-AGED COMEDY.

NONE but one acquainted with the possibilities of the place could have had any idea of the storm raging at Christmas Cove somewhere about the 1st of March, 185—. It was a social storm, something of the nature of a cyclone, and threatened for a time the entire subversion of Church and State. The cause of this cyclone was a brief sentence or two wafted from ear to ear.

Christmas Cove was at that time a small, compact village, with little in the nature of the country around, composed of equal parts of rock and spruce, to draw settlers far from the meeting-house store and school-house, which composed its nucleus.

News in such contracted limits flies fast. These few sentences started on their mission of destruction at half-past nine A.M., and by half-past ten had reached every ear. They were conveyed by a telegraphic line of electrified

women ; but Kenelm himself took them to Sam Race's sail-loft, the resort of the male population when home from sea.

These are the sentences :—" Mr. Hardin' and Sarianny Durfee have been slidin' downhill together. Kenelm see 'em with his own eyes. Mr. Hardin' was settin' in Sarianny's lap."

Now when we consider that Mr. Harding was a middle-aged clergyman, installed some six months before over the Christmas Cove church, and that Sarianna Durfee was an eminently respectable middle-aged spinster, our wonder at the consternation and dismay aroused by these sentences is lessened.

During the six months of Mr. Harding's sojourn at Christmas Cove he had won golden opinions from its inhabitants. They were a church-going people. Almost every family had its representative in the meeting-house on Sunday. The minister was the oracle of the place, and still retained much of the ancient supremacy of his class. For Christmas Cove was easily accessible only by boats, and modern ideas, including that of the fallibility of the clergy, had failed as yet to penetrate there to any considerable extent.

The men liked Mr. Harding ; the women liked him ; the children liked him ; yea, the very dogs, whose heads he never failed to pat friendlily, liked him.

His sermons were both interesting and orthodox. No one could say concerning them what had been said of his immediate predecessor's, that "there

wasn't doctrine enough in 'em to save a smelt"—the smallest of the fish that frequented the waters about the wharf.

He was always welcome at Sam Race's sail-loft, a high, airy place, full of the scent of tar and newropes. A stove was screened off in one corner around which the men sat and smoked their pipes summer and winter. Mr. Harding did not smoke, but he owned to a liking for the fragrance of tobacco, and its consumption, which had almost doubled under the ministration of the late incumbent, who had waged relentless warfare against it, fell off considerably under Mr. Harding's milder sway.

He was equally welcome at the tea-tables of the women. His digestion was good. He never refused doughnuts or pie; and he could drink strong green tea. Whereas the late incumbent took his black and drowned in water. It was a comfort to entertain a man who wasn't always pickin' round as though there was nothin' good enough for him to eat.

The Christmas Cove minister always served as School Committee, comprising in his single person the whole board and officers. In the discharge of that function Mr. Harding was as delightful as in that of every other. The children brightened at his entrance, whereas the presence of his predecessor had invariably acted as an extinguisher. Consequently the schoolmistress admired Mr. Harding.

Cynics may suggest that his celibate condition made a large factor in his pop-

ularity. For Mr. Harding was unmarried, while the late incumbent had a wife. Not so, however. The good women never failed to close their list of his perfections with the lament that there was no woman at the parsonage. There was a woman, of course, but it was old Mrs. Higgins, who acted as house-keeper, and did not count.

It was at first supposed that he was a widower. But on inquiring it was ascertained that he had never married. A bachelor clergyman was an anomaly in the experience of most of his parishioners. They could not understand it, and a pretty little romance, woven of conjecture, took shape in time, concerning an early love who had expired of consumption or some other equally interesting disease. This romance added much to his attractiveness, especially in the minds of the sentimentally inclined, and to these what a blow was it to learn that he had been seen "slidin' downhill with Sarianny Durfee, settin' in her lap!"

The men at the sail-loft laughed. Mr. Harding had won their liking by his pre-eminently manly qualities. "A man every inch of him!" was their verdict.

That he should take to sliding downhill did not surprise them. It was good sport and first-rate exercise on a cold March day. But "slidin' with Sarianny Durfee, and settin' in her lap!" that was a reversal of the general practice that did surprise them. Most of them had slid downhill in their day, and accom-

panied with a lass too. But they didn't set in *her* lap—not they !

But it is time to turn to the hapless Sarianna, come to be, metaphorically speaking, in the mouth of every villager ; Sarianna, who was sitting at home with tingling ears—if there is any truth in the familiar saying.

She lived in a cottage just on the eastern verge of the village ; near enough not to feel lonely, and yet far enough off to give a sense of seclusion. This cottage was built by her father, who was a sea captain, and it had a row of port-holes running all around just below the eaves. Her father had gone down with his ship off Cape Horn many years before, and one by one her three brothers, all sailor lads, had gone to the same death.

Roland was washed off the vessel on which he was first mate while weathering the same perilous point in a raging gale. Will, who was captain, had caught sight of him struggling and crying out to him to pick him up, as the great ship flew on before the blast and left him to his fate in that wild waste of waters.

Will himself was buried in the Indian Ocean, and the ship upon which the youngest and best-beloved of them all, the light-hearted merry Jack, had sailed never returned.

Her mother, too, was dead, and Sarianna lived alone in the cottage. The accumulated savings of the father and brothers were hers, and, though small, were amply sufficient for her wants. She sometimes wished they had

been less, and then she would have had to go away and earn her living. She had never been out of Christmas Cove, and she sometimes had an insatiable longing to see something of the world of which her father and brothers had told her so much.

Her housework, however, employed a good deal of her time, and on the whole she was not unhappy. Only on such early March days as these, when there was a touch of spring in the air. For Sarianna had found out that fallacy about autumn being the melancholy season, and spring that of hope. Somehow, when the days lengthened and she found the first hepatica in its furry coat, she always thought of Jack and the rest of them with a little pain at her heart, of which time had failed to rid her—in accordance with another fallacy.

Her age was—I cannot tell exactly without consulting the family register, but she was somewhere in the neighbourhood of forty; a year more or less does not matter. She had hated to put on a cap, although it was the custom for women of her age to wear one. So she had compromised with a "headdress" of white lace for visitings. When at home she liked best the look of her abundant hair as she saw it in her looking-glass.

On this particular March morning of the day when the social cyclone broke over Christmas Cove she had been unusually restive. Her housework was done by nine o'clock, and there were two hours in which to sit and sew before

time to begin preparations for the twelve o'clock dinner. But she did not feel like sewing. She did not feel like doing anything. She felt as though she should fly! If she were going to be as nervous as this she should have to give up tea.

She would go out if there were anywhere to go but to the same old places, to the store and post office, and Miss Eagles'. But she did not want to buy anything, she never had letters, and she made her own gowns; somehow she wanted an object to draw her out.

Sloping down, just back of her cottage, was an old timber slide, smooth, steep, and about a quarter of a mile long. She could see it from her south kitchen window. The inch of snow which had fallen during the last twenty-four hours lay lightly upon the more solid accumulation of the winter.

Fifteen years ago she had gone down that slide with Jack when he was at home that last time. What a jolly good time they had, grown man and woman though they were! Dear old Jack! the very sled was still hanging in the wood-house, Jack's sled when he was a boy; none of your little fanciful affairs with "Fairy" or "Snow Queen" in gilt letters on the side, but a stout sled of honest hickory, made to last a life-time and big enough to carry two.

How she should like to try it once more, to see how it would seem to slide downhill again! She went into the wood-house and took down the sled. Then she pinned a small shawl on her

head and stepped out. She looked furtively around. No one was in sight. In fact there was not likely to be at that hour of the day. She climbed the fence. It was but a little way, for the spruce wood which grew thickly on either side the timber slide reached almost to her garden.

She sat down upon the sled, tucked in her skirts carefully, and started pushing herself along at first with her feet.

And now by what chance was it, through what crooked coincidence, I ask, that Mr. Harding should have been proceeding at exactly that time by a little-frequented path that crossed the timber slide on his way to the neighbouring hamlet of Hard Scrabble? And furthermore, why did he arrive at precisely the right moment to collide with the sled? Why not a little earlier or a little later? Is there, indeed, a fate that shapes our ends, rough hew them though we may? Or was it Cupid that——.

But I am not going to let the cat out of my bag at this early point in my story. Suffice it, that just as Sarianna had completed about a third of the way, and was going with all steam on, so to speak, Mr. Harding stepped out from the wood, the sled struck him, took him off his feet and seated him squarely in Sarianna's lap, after which fashion they completed the run. So swift was the descent, there was no time to speak. The sled struck a snowdrift at the foot of the slide and they were thrown into it.

Mr. Harding was on his feet in an instant, and helped Sarianna upon hers. Had he followed his first impulse he would have laughed. But he caught sight of her dismayed countenance and controlled himself.

He knew Sarianna, of course ; knew her as well as any of his parishioners, whom he was constantly meeting at tea-drinkings, sewing-circles, and church meetings. He had called at the nautical cottage more than once, and been entertained in its best room. But their intercourse hitherto had been of a decorous order. Nothing so unprecedented as this, or anything approaching to it had occurred ; and Sarianna was overwhelmed with confusion.

Though she did not know it, she was looking her best. The small shawl had become unpinned and had fallen off half way down the slide, and her brown hair had been frizzed by that admirable artist, the wind, in most becoming fashion. A fine colour tinged her ordinarily somewhat pale cheeks, and her confusion did not render her less interesting. She tried to speak, but her tongue refused to articulate. Pitying her embarrassment, Mr. Harding made a grave apology for his inopportune appearance, and disappeared in the wood towards Hard Scrabble.

Sarianna, pulling the sled after her, climbed the slide, picking up her shawl of shepherd's plaid by the way. She re-climbed the fence and re-hung the sled. A man in her condition of mind would have relieved his feelings by a

little mild swearing. But being a woman, she was denied that outlet for her emotions. And so she sat down and brooded over the affair till she went into a species of hysteria, alternately shedding tears and laughing wildly. For Sarianna was not deficient in a sense of the ludicrous.

"I'm thankful nobody saw us!" was her fervent summing-up.

Mr. Harding, on his way to Hard Scrabble, indulged in interjectory explosions of laughter, also exclaiming fervently at intervals, "Good heavens! if anybody had seen us!"

Neither of the two innocents suspected that a pair of eyes had witnessed the whole; not quite the whole, however, for Kenelm did not catch sight of them till after the collision. And so, as Mr. Harding walked off, and Kenelm, abandoning his gathering of refuse wood, betook himself to the village with his precious bit of news, it was under the impression that the whole thing was prearranged, and that the two had been sliding downhill all the morning. He was as many seconds too late as Mr. Harding had been too early. Such is the total depravity of circumstance, that mischievous god who delights in cross-purposes and endless confusions!

There was a prayer-meeting that night in the school-house. Things are in the air, it is said, and certainly it could only have been through some atmospheric influence — or thought-channel, like the native East Indian's secret telegraph — that Mr. Harding

became aware before the evening was over that the little comedy of the morning had had an eye-witness. For nothing was said, though he could not but observe upon the faces of the elders an unusual gravity of expression, while on the part of the youngsters there was more than the ordinary propensity to subdued gigglings.

Sarianna was not present. In fact, before the day was over she too had become aware that her luckless escapade of the morning was known to the village. She learned the fact, however, by word of mouth. Achsah Stevens came in and told her. Achsah was a diligent seeker and purveyor of news. She was known as "The Cove Express," and she acted as her own interviewer. She arrived at Sarianna's while the latter was weighing the question whether to go or not to go to the prayer-meeting. She had felt that she could not face Mr. Harding quite yet. And after Achsah's call she had no spirit left.

She was by no means a cowardly creature, and could generally stand her ground even against Achsah's impertinence. But on this occasion Achsah had her at an overwhelming disadvantage. She began with the abrupt announcement that it was all over the village that Sarianny and Mr. Hardin' had be'n sliding downhill together both on one sled, and—here even Achsah hesitated; it was a thing almost too bad to say. Yet in the interest of truth and general information

it must be spoken—"and he settin' in her lap!" Was it so?

And Sarianna could not say a word. She was too truthful to deny the fact, and too utterly overwhelmed with confusion to attempt an explanation. And what explanation could she make? The very fact of a woman of forty sliding downhill at all required explanation. So she only meekly asked, would Achsah sit down and stay a while?

"No," replied Achsah, briskly, eager to get out her evening edition without delay. "I can't stop. I'm sorry for you, Sarianny; at your age, too! I said I couldn't believe it when I first heard on't, Sarianny Durfee misconductin' herself that way! 'No,' says I, 'I can't believe it. I'll just go right up,' says I, 'and see for myself. Seein's believin'.' No, I can't stop, I've got a batch o' bread in bakin', and I must hurry right back. Most likely it'll be the means o' upsettin' Mr. Hardin'. Such a dretful example to the parish!"

The everyday headgear of the Christmas Cove women was a small shawl in winter and a cape sunbonnet in summer. And Sarianna watched the disappearance of Achsah's red and black Rob Roy plaid down the winding road with a feeling almost akin to despair. The poor creature could hardly have been in lower depths had she committed a crime. She stayed away from prayer-meeting. But the next day was Saturday, and then would come Sunday.

All through Saturday she was alone.

Ordinarily she would have had a number of callers, for the Covites were a sociable folk. It was hard to say whether their presence or their absence was most torturing. She knew everybody must be talking about her, laughing, and saying dreadful things.

In all her life she had never stayed away from meeting except on one or two occasions when the roads had been hopelessly blocked with snow. She had the true old New England conscience in regard to church-going. To stay away from the sanctuary was a sin. But how could she face not only Mr. Harding, but the whole congregation! She did her Saturday's work—the cleaning, and the preparation of the Sunday's dinner—with a heart of lead. She slept but little that night. She could neither make up her mind to go to meeting on the morrow nor to stay away.

The situation may have its amusing side; there are few that do not have. But Sarianna's struggle was a real one. And when she did finally make up her mind that it was her duty to go, which was not until the nine o'clock Sunday bell was ringing, surely no martyr at the stake ever made a greater sacrifice for principle. The smart of fire is not more unbearable than that of ridicule. And the sense of personal integrity which may enable one to bear up under the former often fails utterly as a defence against the latter.

She trembled so as she walked up the aisle to her pew near the pulpit she

thought she should drop before reaching it. Her very weakness of mind and body forced her to put on an air of determination that was construed to be one of defiance. She heard scarcely a word of the service. For the most part it was a meaningless buzz in her ears. The whole meeting-house swam so at times she thought she was going to faint. But the reflection that if she did she would have to be carried out, braced her nerves like a tonic. She prayed that she might not make any more unseemly exhibitions of herself for the public amusement.

She stood with the congregation at the last singing, turning about to face the choir in the gallery. Like most country choirs, it was made up of young people. Sarianna could not but notice an expression of amusement on their faces; somewhat chastened, it is true, by the place and the fact that the eyes of the congregation were upon them, but unmistakable, nevertheless. And between each stanza of the hymn, while the fiddlers were playing the interlude, every eye was turned in her direction, some furtively, others openly and boldly.

She felt as though she must sink through the floor with shame. The blood surged up into her face. She felt her cheeks burning.

After the benediction the men passed rapidly out, the women, as usual, lingering to speak together concerning the sermon, or any other topic that might come uppermost. But for Sarianna

there were no friendly handshakings, no how-d'y-dos, or cheerful exchange of opinion concerning the weather. In fact, she did not wait for any. She walked out with her face held straight before her, looking neither to the right nor left.

On each side of the broad steps on the outside were massed, according to their wont, the men of the congregation, and Sarianna walked down the short flight with the consciousness that every eye there was fixed upon her.

She reached home somehow—she hardly knew how—unlocked the door, and then locked it behind her, with the fierce determination to shut out the dreadful world that was laughing and mocking at her misery. In certain straits it matters little whether our world comprises an empire or only a handful of people. The bitterness of its verdict does not consist in its numbers, but in the fact that it is our world.

She took off her Sunday bonnet, smoothed out the strings, and put it carefully in its band-box, having first laid her lisle-thread gloves neatly folded in the bottom. Then she unpinned the brooch that fastened her mantilla at the throat — an old-fashioned thing, containing the hair of the three lads, cut from their heads by the mother herself—put that in its box, and, folding her mantilla, laid it in the left-hand corner of the upper bureau drawer.

Habit is an excellent and steady

thing in the throes of life. The only trouble is that you cannot keep on for ever doing things mechanically. So, having put in its place the last thing, Sarianna dropped into a chair and gave way. She cried and sobbed with the helpless abandon of a child. Smut came and rubbed sympathetically against her, putting up his back and purring, and even jumping into her lap and rubbing his cool moist nose against hers. Finding his efforts at consolation vain, he curled himself in her lap and fell asleep.

The fit of sobbing ended in a splitting headache, which incapacitated her from any thought even of going to the afternoon service, and she passed the remainder of the day on the sitting-room lounge, feeling, so far as she was able to feel anything, like a hopeless reprobate, shut out from the means of grace and the sympathies of her kind.

Mr. Harding had not had a comfortable day. Once or twice during service he had given a casual glance in Sarianna's direction, and had been shocked at the pale and drawn appearance of her face. A week before, if any one had asked him concerning her personal appearance, he would have been unable to give an adequate description. But now he recalled it very clearly.

He remembered that she had an agreeable face. Not handsome, and certainly not pretty, but suggestive of a kindly nature, and a by no means narrow understanding. Her eyes were black, usually soft in expression, though

he had seen them when they wore a keen look of interest. Her skin was smooth and rather pale, but it could show colour on occasion, as on that morning when he faced her after helping her out of the snow. A gentle face, with much quiet reserve in it.

To this pleasing picture in his mind her appearance Sunday morning offered a painful contrast. It was indicative of much mental suffering. Was she really taking the little comedy so seriously? He had been inclined only to laugh at it until exasperated at finding it was known to the village, and learning the interpretations put upon it. But it was evident that what aroused in him only anger and disgust, touched her much more deeply.

He observed her absence in the afternoon, and confessed to a feeling of anxiety as to whether she could be ill. He thought about her a good deal through the day Monday, and finally decided that he would go and see for himself how she was as soon as night fairly shut down. In the present state of village gossip he could not muster courage to go by daylight.

Sarianna had been all day in that calm, quiescent state that usually follows a period of intense excitement. She really felt too weak both in body and mind to care much about anything. No one called during the day. It was Monday and washing-day to be sure, but some of the more enterprising of the women, who were always up at three o'clock on that morning of the week,

usually made it a point to run in as early as nine, in order to remark casually that their washing was out before seven. Sarianna was only too thankful that they stayed away. She herself washed everything washable, and allowed herself no opportunity to sit down and think.

Mr. Harding arrived shortly after the lamp was lighted. She drew forward the great chair nervously for him, and her voice as she essayed to talk was very uncertain. He on his part manifested the utmost composure. His voice was even gentler than usual. His manner had more than its ordinary suave courtesy. He talked on about the weather—which was misconducting itself after the usual March fashion—about Smut, who had jumped upon his knee, about the plants blooming so bounteously in the windows.

He waited for no response. That the conversation should take the form of a monologue on his part seemed to him apparently the most natural thing in the world. He took up a pink-throated shell which lay on the table by his side. Was it an East Indian shell, and did one of the brothers bring it?

Yes, Jack brought it.

Ah, the brother he had heard so much about, who was such a favourite in the village. He had often thought he should like to know more about him.

Sarianna had a miniature of him, one that had been done in foreign parts. She brought it out. She was proud of that miniature.

"A handsome, manly-looking sailor," said Mr. Harding. "Was he married?"

"Yes," replied Sarianna, "he was married, and he took his wife and child with him that last voyage. The child was a little girl named Sarianna for me. But we always called her Tots. I did so hate to have that baby go! She was born in this house, and I helped nurse her. You know, we never knew what became of them."

He had heard something of the sad story, said Mr. Harding, tentatively, and Sarianna went on, won by his kindly interest, to the entire forgetting of the unlucky escapade of Thursday.

"The ship was found with all sails spread. She was sighted off Gibraltar by Cap'n Burgess, a dear friend of Jack's. He knew her at once. Sailors always know a ship as we do a carriage, and who it belongs to. He thought there was something wrong, she moved so strangely and clumsily as though there was no one at the rudder. And he couldn't see anybody even through his glass. So he went himself in a boat, and sure enough it was Jack's ship, and there wasn't a soul on board. But everything was exactly as though they had just gone away. There was a fire in the caboose and a kettle on, and the table set for breakfast in the cabin. And there was a work-basket with a needle sticking in the hem of a little petticoat Mary was making for Tots, just as she had laid it down. I've got that now, with the needle still in it. Cap'n Burgess brought it to mother and me.

"Cap'n Burgess was very good, and did all he could. He hunted all over the ship, and he brought us Jack's things. But he had to leave the ship, and we heard afterwards it was towed in somewhere. Some folks thought it was pirates. But then if it was pirates, Cap'n Burgess said, why didn't they take things? But everything was there, Jack's gold watch was hanging over his berth.

"It does seem hard that we could never know. We knew about Roland; that was dreadful. And Willie, too. But this was the worst of all. Jack was the last, you know. Mother used to say she could bear it better if she could only know just what had become of them and Tots. Sometimes I think Tots may be living somewhere. She'd be sixteen now."

"A seaman's life is a hard life; it's a brave one, too, so full of adventure," said Mr. Harding. "It puts a man on his mettle. Were either of your brothers ever shipwrecked?"

"No, but father was once. It was somewhere where it never rained, and there wasn't any water to drink; on a little coral island in the Pacific. And so he had to contrive some way to get water. He took one of the iron kettles they tried out blubber in—father always went whaling—and filled it full of sea water. Then he fastened a piece of sail-cloth over it tight, and made a hole in the cloth and fitted in a piece of lead pipe. He made a fire under the kettle and caught the steam from the pipe

and it cooled into fresh water. That always seemed such a curious thing to me."

"It is as I said," replied Mr. Harding. "A seaman has to bestir himself and use his brains, whereas a landsman often forgets that he has any brains."

And so the evening slipped by, and Mr. Harding lingered far beyond his original intention. It was such a cosy room, he hated to go. A wood-fire burned upon the hearth, and the astral lamp shed a mellow light, very comforting to eyes weakened with much reading by night as Mr. Harding's were.

But the hour-hand of the tall clock, remorseless as the time it marked, moved on, and the internal works gave their customary convulsive warning that the hour was about to strike. It was nine, and there was nothing for it but to go. Primitive hours were kept at Christmas Cove.

The contrast with the bleak March night without, as he buttoned his overcoat to the chin and bent almost at right angles before the desolating east wind, made the recollection of the pleasant fireside still pleasanter. And even his own particular domicile suffered in comparison. Mrs. Higgins was all very well, doubtless, but her presence and ministrations failed to create the homelike atmosphere he had breathed in Sarianna's sitting-room.

As to Sarianna, she was sure she did not know where the evening had gone to. And she was fairly in bed before it

occurred to her to recall the unhappy incident of Thursday.

"He's real good," she remarked to Smut, who slept on the outside of the bed. "He never mentioned it, and what is more, he never looked as though he remembered it."

Her dreams that night were more comfortable, and the pleasant atmosphere of the evening extended over the next day. If Mr. Harding did not despise her, she felt she did not care so much if the village did laugh at her.

The next day Mr. Harding called upon Mrs. Josiah Adams. He wanted to talk to somebody, and he considered Mrs. Adams, though not the best-educated woman in his parish, as possessed of the greatest amount of common sense, which, after all, is a much more valuable possession, so far as the general welfare is concerned.

Mrs. Adams looked reproachfully at him as they shook hands. "Oh, Mr. Hardin'!" was all she said.

"It can't be possible, Mrs. Adams, that you believe all those wretched things that are being said about Sarianna Durfee and myself!" remonstrated Mr. Harding.

"But you don't deny you was slidin' downhill together, settin' in her lap? Kenelm said he see you, and Kenelm, if he is a dretful gossip, tells the truth."

Mr. Harding laughed. "It's true enough," he said, "but why has it never occurred to these good people that it was a sheer accident?"

"Accident!" ejaculated Mrs. Adams,

with more than a touch of incredulity in her voice. "I don't see how that can be. Folks don't slide downhill settin' in each other's laps by accident."

"Listen, and you shall see," and Mr. Harding told the whole story.

"Well I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Adams. "What on earth could 'a' possessed Sarianny to take to slidin' downhill at her age! Why she's forty if she's a day, Mr. Hardin'! And to think you should 'a' come along jest in the very nick o' time!" And struck with the ludicrousness of the situation, Mrs. Adams leaned back in her great rocking-chair and laughed till the tears bowled down over her round, red cheeks.

"Well, that does beat all natur'!" she gasped out, at last, wiping off the tears with her apron. "Won't Josiah split himself when he hears on't! And to think you should 'a' happened along jest then! Well, it's my guess Sarianny won't take to slidin' downhill again in a hurry!" And Mrs. Adams yielded a second time to her sense of the ludicrous, and went off into fresh convulsions, fairly losing her breath, and growing so purple in the face, Mr. Harding experienced a momentary fear of apoplexy ensuing.

"Do calm yourself, Mrs. Adams," he begged. "It is funny, and I don't wonder you laugh. But it's been anything but fun to Sarianna herself, we may be sure."

"That's so!" said Mrs. Adams, instantly sobered. "I declare for't, I

couldn't help pityin' her Sunday. She looked so dretful pale and peaked. I thought first I'd go up and see her about it. And then I said to Josiah, what good would that do? I couldn't say anything but just you oughtn't to do such things at your age, Sarianny; it's makin' a sight o' talk. But there, says I to Josiah, I might just as well stay away as to go Job-comfortin'. I'm real glad you come and told me about it, Mr. Hardin'. I've always set by Sarianny, and I couldn't bear to think of her goin' wrong. But what *was* I to think when Kenelm said he see it with his own eyes? Yes, I'm real glad you come. And I'll pin on my shawl right off, and run up this minute and see her. Lor'! I don't believe I've stayed away so long sence the old lady died."

"And I wouldn't say anything about it to anybody else, not even to her, unless she mentions it," suggested Mr. Harding.

"Why, ain't you goin' to explain 'twas an accident to the rest o' the folks? They're all dretfully riled up about it, sayin' there must always 'a' be'n a screw loose somewhere, or Sarianny wouldn't 'a' misconducted herself so at this time o' life, and that it's a dretful example to the young folks for the minister——"

"Oh, never mind what they say," hastily interrupted Mr. Harding. "Least said, soonest mended, you know. They'll find out the rights of it soon enough. And if you just go up and see her in your usual friendly way, that'll help to

make things blow over. When there's a gale about here, you know, all the vessels run into the Cove and lay to till it is over. And that's the best thing to do in social gales, Mrs. Adams. Just lay by and wait. When it lulls a little we'll put out and explain—if it's necessary."

"I'll jest take her up a quarter o' that loaf o' riz cake I baked Saturday," soliloquized Mrs. Adams aloud, as she bustled about after Mr. Harding had gone. "I wouldn't 'a' believed when I was stirrin' on't up Friday night that I should be takin' a slice to Sarianny on Tuesday. But there, we none of us know what a day may bring forth. And how I did feel then, to be sure! As though I never could put no confidence in anybody again. I've always set such a sight by Sarianny. I'm dretful glad Mr. Hardin' come in."

"I thought, Sarianny, I'd jest bring you up a bite o' my riz cake I baked Saturday," she began, as she opened the kitchen door and came upon Sarianna frying doughnuts in a little kettle swung on the crane over the kitchen fire. She was feeling quite cheerful, though her smile as she greeted Mrs. Adams had a touch of apprehensiveness in it. But the latter went briskly on.

"It ain't first-rate, but it's fair, Josiah says. It's made after my mother's weddin' cake recipe, a leetle scantier o' butter and jest a pinch o' sugar short. That recipe's always be'n a great fav'rite in our family. All us girls had

our weddin' cake made from it. My mother said *her* mother set up all night to watch hern for fear it should rise too much, and so spile. But, lor ! she was an only daughter, and folks 'll do anything for an only daughter. My mother had six. But there, Sarianny, I s'pose you've heard me tell that dozens o' times. Josiah says I'm beginnin' to show my age tellin' the same old story over 'n' over. But Josiah will have his joke. I declare for't, Sarianny, how that Calla lily o' yourn does grow and blossom. I always do say your plants bloom jest as though they liked to do it.

"And how good them doughnuts do smell ! Your mother always made the best doughnuts in the Cove. I remember one cold day when I was comin' home from school she was fryin', and I smelt 'em as I was passin', and nothin' for it but I must have one. I was only five year old then, and a spunky little creatur'. And she fetched me one herself, a-laughin' like anything. 'Twas a twister, and I can see it now and her too. She was a proper han'some woman, *and* as good as gold."

Good Mrs. Adams had an expansive cast of mind, and was never at a loss for conversational topics. She filled up the time of her stay admirably. She tasted the doughnuts and declared that Sarianna's own mother never made better. She left Sarianna in a cheerier frame of mind even than she found her. The Thursday's escapade was not mentioned, and Sarianna devoutly hoped

that it was already being forgotten. Her knowledge of Christmas Cove, of the tenacity with which it held and discussed even the least interesting of news, might have taught her better. And this was a savoury morsel not to be masticated and digested in a hurry.

It was felt on the part of many, of certain busy women especially, to be a grievance that Mr. Harding should carry himself so unconcernedly. He went out and in with his head up as though nothing had happened. Sari-anna's evident distress on Sunday had partially satisfied their sense of justice. But was Mr. Harding to go scot-free? Transgressors should be punished, or what was the good of being good? You might just as well do as you liked and enjoy yourself. A reversal of the universal approval of Mr. Harding seemed imminent.

Pressure was brought to bear upon the senior deacon ; he was told that it was his duty to approach Mr. Harding on the subject of the scandal, and to this pressure the deacon finally yielded. But Mr. Harding was not a man to be easily approached if he did not wish to be. He was leaning over the bridge that spanned an inlet of the sea as the deacon drew near. He was looking at the starfish that lay on the bottom like a bed of gorgeous flowers, crimson and pink, yellow and purple. Over and around danced the "netted sunbeams," touching them here and there with brilliant gold.

But Mr. Harding was not thinking of

the starfish. He was thinking of Sarianna. He was undecided whether to go and see her again that night. But the deacon decided him.

The deacon was aware that he had a disagreeable task before him, and hesitated to begin. "I — hem! — you, hem! — that is, hem! — I feel called upon——"

Mr. Harding at once "twigged," as they say. "Oh, I beg pardon, deacon! At another time I shall be happy. But I am really in a great hurry. I was looking a moment at the starfish. Such curious and interesting creatures! Such remarkable colours! Another time, but I have not a moment to spare now. Good day, deacon." And Mr. Harding was off, and the deacon was not sorry to see him go.

He had no appetite for his disagreeable task. The deacon was an optimist. Theoretically, he held man as wholly vile. Practically, he had the largest confidence in his inherent goodness. It was his general belief that most things would turn out well in the end if let alone. Therefore he was not sorry to be respite.

He had, however, given the requisite aid to Mr. Harding in making up his mind. The latter decided to call on Sarianna again that night. It was his duty to stand by her. It was ridiculous to attempt an explanation. The facts could not be denied, and Mr. Harding was sufficiently versed in human nature to know that, given the facts, people generally believe what they wish. All

the explanations in the world would not alter the inferences drawn by a certain class of minds. Like the deacon, he had faith in the ultimate verdict. He could wait.

Meanwhile it was clearly his duty to stand by Sarianna. For though the innocent cause, he certainly was the cause of her present embarrassing distress. So he went that night, and again and again. And he soon became aware that it was not duty or a sense of justice alone that moved him to do so.

In fact, before the end of the second week the need of his championship was passed. Somehow the whole story had leaked out. Mrs. Adams, as she declared, hadn't breathed it to a soul but Josiah. But it had leaked out. Josiah was a frequenter of the sail-loft. It was possible that in a moment of weakness he had betrayed the marital confidence. However that may be, the truth was known, and Sarianna exonerated from the charge of unmaidenly conduct. The village still continued to smile, even to laugh; but both laugh and smile were kindly. They were aware that Mr. Harding was paying a series of evening visits at the nautical cottage, and their histrionic sense was gratified at the possibility of an appropriate ending to the little comedy.

Mr. Harding found the evenings spent in Sarianna's sitting-room extremely pleasant. He liked to contemplate the trim upright figure seated on the other side of the table whereon stood the astral lamp. He could do so

without seeming impertinence, for she was always busy over some bit of sewing or knitting. He became familiar with the pose and outline of the small head with its crown of dark hair, which in certain lights was a glowing auburn ; with the delicate ear set close to the head ; with the dimple in her left cheek which showed when she laughed.

As she grew accustomed to his presence she laughed often. It was almost like having Jack with her again. She went back to the feeling of that old companionship, and talked and laughed as in those old days and as she had never done since. There came to be a certain comradeship in her manner such as girls and women have who have grown up wholly with brothers.

Mr. Harding began to understand her escapade ; what it was that had stirred in her a desire to slide downhill once more. And he inwardly blessed himself that she had done so. Otherwise she might have remained to him only a middle-aged though somewhat agreeable spinster.

One night the blood flushed the slender neck and suffused both cheek and ear at certain words he said. She was knitting, and for an instant she paused, and then went on confusedly ; for the unexpectedness of what he had said blurred her vision. Twenty years before she would not have been taken so by surprise ; but the sweet old maid had long since given up thoughts of wedded love.

Mr. Harding waited. Then, as she

did not speak, he got up and went round beside her. He put his hand upon hers.

"Will you not speak?" he said.
"Will you not say yes?"

She let fall into her lap the knitting in which she was blindly dropping stitches, and, looking up, said, "Oh, I'm not good enough for a minister's wife."

"You are more than good enough for me; and it is I who ask you to be my wife, and not the minister," he replied.

The small head drooped. "You are too kind," she said, softly.

"No, it is you who are going to be kind."

Then she clasped his hand and laid her cheek against it. "Oh, I am too happy!" she said. "If only Jack and the rest could know!"

To this there could be but one answer.





A BELATED LETTER.





A BELATED LETTER.

(From "*Harper's Bazar*."

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HAT'S that y' got there, Cy?"

The person addressed as "Cy" was the postmaster of Haddington. He was looking curiously at a letter which he held in his left hand. He held it in his left hand at the end of his left arm, because that was the only hand and arm he had. His right arm had been shot off at Gettysburg.

"It's a letter for 'Miss Dosia Belknap, Haddington, Mass. The Maples,' Cy read mechanically. "It's darn queer. I don't b'lieve she's had a letter sence I come in. Fact, I *know* she ain't."

"Grant gi'n y' the job, didn't he, Cy?"

"Yes ; an' I've had it goin' on 'leven years, an' she ain't had no letter in that time, I *know*."

"Waal, she didn't have none in my time nuther, an' I had the office goin' on twenty year."

The last speaker was a short, fat

man, whose shrill voice was singularly out of harmony with his physical proportions. The effect was like that of the bark of a Skye terrier from the brutal muzzle of a bull-dog. His name was Ragge, and he was familiarly known in Haddington as "Old Ragge."

"What's the matter with the letter, Cy?" continued the first speaker. "Jes pass it round."

"There 'tis;" and Cy handed it over for general inspection.

Old Ragge, in virtue of his former office of postmaster, claimed the first look at it. The letter was folded in the old way before envelopes came in, and sealed with a large red seal; it was yellow with age, and exhaled the odour peculiar to ancient paper. Old Ragge observed the odour, conveyed the letter to his nose, and then passed it on to his neighbour next in the circle around the cylinder stove.

It was June, and the thermometer stood 70° in the shade. One might have said that the loungers centred about the stove merely from force of habit—a habit formed during the five months of a Haddington winter—had not the box of sand in which the stove stood done duty as a cuspidor, which fact explained the geometric figure without resorting to the subtle force of habit.

"Crazy, ain't she?" queried Raish, the son of Old Ragge, in whose voice the bull-dog dominated the Skye terrier.

"Crazy!" shrieked Old Ragge, in his shrillest operatic tenor. "Why, y'

fool, don't y' know she is? Crazy's a loon."

"Waal, y' needn't take my head off. How'd I know? I never see her," rumbled Raish. He was always advancing palpable suggestions upon the subject under consideration, to which the irascible Old Ragge invariably shrieked his exaggerated replies.

"Well, well," remarked Uncle Pendency, white-haired, eighty, and given to reminiscence, balancing the letter in his tremulous hand, "she was as pooty a cretur as ever come into Haddington meetin'-house. A slim figger an' leetle hand an' foot—law! how she would trip up the broad isle of a Sabba' day! An' what an eye she had!—deep, deep, like a brook where the trout lie." Uncle Pendency had been in his day as devout a follower of the piscatory art as was ever Izaak Walton, and even at the time of which I write could cast his line and hook his fish with the best of them.

"Ruther sweet on her." And Raish winked one eye at his right-hand neighbour, vainly striving to modulate his voice to a whisper indistinguishable to his father's ear. But Old Ragge heard, and his wrath fell.

"Th' Lord only knows how I come t' be father to sech a fool! Why, don't y' know she's ole Gin'ral Belknap's darter? Gin'ral Belknap's I say—a Revilutionary gin'ral; none o' y'r new-fangled sort. This gineration ain't no respecter o' pussons nor nuthin' else, a-jestin' in this unseemly way." And if

looks could annihilate, Old Ragge's fiery glance of indignation would have instantaneously blotted out Raish's two hundred pounds avoirdupois.

"His ways are past findin' out ;" and Uncle Pendency, deaf, and oblivious of the passage at arms between Old Ragge and his son, meandered gently and quaveringly on. "It was fore-ordained and predestinated to be from the beginnin', world without end ; an' if it was t' be, it was t' be, an' nothin' could stand ag'in it." Uncle Pendency was an uncompromising Calvinist, and as firm a believer in fatalism as the most devout Mohammedan. "Such a bright intelligence ! an' it went out—out like a candle that is snuffed. Dark and myster'ous are Thy ways—unaccountable, un—ac—count——" And he gently dropped into one of those naps he took at intervals of five minutes or so.

"That's his nineteenth since we've been settin' here. I've counted 'em," remarked Raish ; and Old Ragge glared helplessly at him.

"Say, Cy, what y' goin' t' dew about it?—send it up?" briskly asked Pollywog, so called from the rapidity of his talk and movements, which name was commonly abbreviated to Polly.

"I s'pose so."

"But a crazy woman, Cy ; jest think o' that—crazy ! How's she goin' to know anything about what's in it ? S'posin' it's about property, now ? Say, hadn't y' better let th' doctor 'r th' min'ster see it fust ? They c'n open it an' see what's best t' dew about it. I'll

go for 'em." And his hand was on the door latch before he had finished.

"Stay, young man!" and Squire Wetherspoon, who was a justice of the peace, took his pipe from his mouth. "There are laws, Mr. Greenslit" (the squire never said "Polly"; such abbreviations, to say nothing of nicknames, are not recognized in law)—"there are laws, and laws must be obeyed. The majesty of law must be respected. Miss Belknap hasn't no guardeen over herself nor her pruperty. She only, in accordance with the sperit and the letter of the law, can open that letter. To open another person's letter is a State-prison offence; a crime, sir—a crime in the eye of the law. Nobody else but a guardeen could have authority to open that letter. Nobody can evade the law with impunity, sir. The minister can't do it, nor the doctor. No, sir; not even a justice of the peace." The squire replaced his pipe, and Pollywog, crushed for the moment by the Johnsonian weight of his remarks, silently resumed his seat in the circle.

"How 'n thunder are we goin' t' find out what's 'n th' letter, then?" drawled a lean, pallid man with melancholy black eyes, who was leaning back in an angle of the room on the two hind-legs of his chair. "That's what I want t' know."

"Have a jury set on it," sputtered Polly, hopping up like a suddenly galvanized frog.

"'Tain't a matter o' hatchin', Polly," drawled the melancholy man, at which

sally the whole circle, with the exception of the squire, whose brain was as impervious to a joke as was that of Sydney Smith's Scotchman, shrieked and roared with laughter, Old Ragge's shrill cackle predominating. Evidently the melancholy man, who was ordinarily addressed as Steve, was considered the wit of the village.

"It's too ser'ous a matter to be treated with levity," said Squire Wetherspoon, looking reprovingly at Old Ragge, whose shrill cackle ceased abruptly as he met the squire's eye. "For not only is the female in question a loonatic, but she is also a female, an' bein' a female *and* a loonatic, she is doubly—hem! in-in-incapacitated," bringing out the formidable polysyllable triumphantly—"incapacitated, sir, from doin' any business. She b'longs to that sect mentioned by St. Paul as the weaker vessel. Woman is the weaker vessel; that fact is established. She is t' be guided by her husban' if she's a wife, an' by her father or brother if she's unmarried, and——"

"By all her male relations if she ain't got no husban' nor father nor brother," drawled Steve, breaking in upon the sluggish current of the squire's speech.

"Jes so, jes so, Mr. Wimpenny," said the squire, turning his pale blue eyes approvingly on Steve's melancholy countenance. "I see you regard the women-folks from the c'rect stand-p'int. They are to be guided and pertected by man."

"An' their property taken care of."

"Sartainly, sartainly," fervently responded the squire. "Women-folks are unfit in their very natur's to have the care o' pruperty. They are fond o' show an' spendin'. Why, sir, if the power were not vested by Scriptur' in the men, this world would be——"

"A fleetin' show," again interrupted Steve.

"Jes so, jes so, Mr. Wimpenny." Now as it was a well-known fact that in the squire's establishment the gray mare was the better horse, and that his wife held the family purse-strings in an inexorable clutch, this bit of comedy was heartily relished by the listeners. After the fashion of henpecked husbands, the squire crowed loudly when abroad.

"So in view of these remarks, an' t' sum up the argerment," he continued, with the air of a debater at a country lyceum, and addressing himself to Steve, whose imperturbable gravity and air of deferential attention were so reassuring—"in view of these remarks, Mr. Wimpenny, I think we may ventur' t' take steps towards app'inting a guardeen over Miss Belknap and her pruperty."

"Oh, jiminy! then we sh'll know all about what's 'n the letter!" ejaculated Pollywog.

The squire looked severely at Polly, and then went on, ignoring him with a superb expression of contempt:

"We may encounter diffikilties, Mr. Wimpenny. Loonatics are gin'rally set. There was old Aunt Judy, my wife's son's wife's great-aunt; *she* was crazy,

an' the settest critter I ever did see—
setter—setter——”

“Than any hog,” mildly bellowed Raish.

“Jes so—though I shouldn't have made egzactly that comparison. To compare a female woman to an animal, and to an animal like a hog, would not be becomin' to a justice of the peace. But as I was on the p'int o' sayin'——”

His audience, however, were never to know what it was the squire was on the point of saying, for at that juncture the outer door swung back, admitting into the tobacco-laden atmosphere a short, slight man, who was greeted by a general “How are y', doctor?”

The doctor had a large nose, and mild, somewhat quizzical, blue eyes. He came in “washing his hands with invisible soap in imperceptible water,” which motion suddenly ceased as his eye fell on Pollywog.

Polly was holding the letter up to one eye. By judiciously pressing with his thumb and forefinger the upper and under edges he had formed an opening, into which he was peering like a ferret into a rat-hole.

“Eh! what are you up to now, Polly?” cried the doctor. “Your curiosity 'll be the death of you yet. Remember Lot's wife.”

“And Aunt Sally's dye tub,” drawled Steve.

Polly dropped the letter as he might have dropped a lively hornets' nest, and the circle around the cylinder stove

again broke into a roar of laughter. This time even the squire's bland, self-satisfied countenance wore a glimmer of a smile.

Polly's curiosity was known to be insatiable, and many a rebuff had he suffered in his attempts to gratify it, and many a sharp experience had he passed through known only to himself. But the episode of the dye tub he had been unable to suppress.

Once upon a time, torn with rage and jealousy at the rumour that Elias Periwinkle, the thrifty owner of a two-hundred-acre farm, was finding favour in the eyes of Aunt Sally, the village tailoress, to whose affections Polly himself had aspired, he determined to secure ocular proof. But alas! in striving to peep in at the kitchen window when the farmer was making an evening call, the unfortunate Pollywog stepped heavily upon the edge of Aunt Sally's dye tub; it tipped, and Pollywog was thrown to the ground, and deluged from head to foot with its contents. The noise of the fall and the deluge brought Aunt Sally and her visitor upon the scene. Polly was dyed a beautiful blue, and was destined never to hear the last of it. For neither Aunt Sally nor the farmer spared this Peeping Tom, but spread the story far and wide.

When the laughter to which Steve's allusion had given rise had subsided, the doctor asked whom the letter was for, and what there was about it that had so excited their curiosity. In reply, Cy handed it to him, and he too read,

half aloud, "Miss Dosia Belknap, Haddington, Mass. The Maples.'" He looked the letter carefully over, softly whistling to himself the while—a habit he had when puzzled or perplexed about anything—and then saying, with his most secretive professional air, "I'll see that she gets it," he put it into his pocket and walked out, leaving the inquisitive circle, still unenlightened, to pursue their fruitless speculations.

And so it was that I chanced to be the bearer to Miss Dosia of this letter which had so stirred the curiosity of the village loungers—for I am the doctor's daughter.

Wonder may perhaps be expressed that my father should have made me the bearer of a letter, and such a letter, to an insane woman. But Miss Dosia was not really "crazy," as the male gossips at the store had put it. She was only a "little out," "queer," "crotchety," "cracked"—all which terms had been applied to her by different people at divers times, and any one of which was of sufficiently descriptive accuracy.

"I'll be there as soon as I can," said my father, as he looked to see that girth and stirrup were all right after assisting me to mount Baal. "I may be there almost as soon as you, and I may be detained till into the evening—anyway stay by if necessary. It's a queer thing, that letter; it's evidently very old, and there's some mystery about it, and there's no telling what effect it may have upon her. A sudden shock may clear her

intellect, or, on the other hand, may drive her into raving insanity."

I was glad to be alone that day, glad of the three miles' ride to The Maples, and I think my father guessed as much when he sent me. As Baal trotted out of the yard and up the hill—all the way from the Corners to The Maples was uphill—my thoughts were busy, not with the age-discoloured letter of which I was the bearer, but with another which lay beside it in the pocket of my riding habit—a letter which had arrived that morning, and which I had read, it is impossible to say how many times, but of which I am safe in affirming that by that time I knew every word. It was from Ross Stuyvesant, and we two were at last betrothed, and the birds sang it that day, and the wild roses bloomed it, and the sky, with its silvery cohorts trooping over its fathomless azure, looked it, and the very breezes whispered it as they swept by laden with the varied odours of mid-June.

As we ascended hill after hill the Connecticut came into view, winding through its green meadows and by its busy towns, till it was lost at last between the twin mountains of Tom and Holyoke. The sloping pasture-lands on either side were rosy pink with the blossoms of the mountain laurel, which paled where they grew in the shade of the woods, like nuns in their cloisters. A soft illusory haze rested upon the distant hill-tops, and obliterated the dividing line of earth and sky.

Ross and I had met for the first time

one day two years before, when he was sketching on the rocks of Gay Head, and I was prospecting for specimens of its brilliant clays. I had ventured too far, and found myself stranded upon a rock from which I could neither make my way up nor down unassisted, and he had come to my rescue—an absurd position, of which at the time, I remember, I was much ashamed, as I had always prided myself—born and bred among the hills of Western Massachusetts—on my expertness in climbing.

Our chance acquaintance ripened with the rapidity of the conjurer's fruit, but my practical, hard-working father from the first frowned upon our love. He cherished the old-fashioned notions concerning the fraternity of artists. In his estimation they were all, without exception, true Bohemians, herding in attics in a clutter of dust and queer foreign miscellany. Smokers of unlimited tobacco, beer-drinkers, consorters with disreputable models, with no religious faith worth mentioning, pagans—he shrank from consigning his only and much-loved daughter to one of such a class. But time and a more intimate acquaintance with my lover had softened, if not entirely obliterated, these prejudices, and he had at last given in, and in a letter to Ross had granted his willing and unqualified consent to our engagement. In the first flush of his gratification Ross had written the letter which lay in my pocket, in which he had begged me to name an early day for our marriage.

And why should I not? I asked myself, as Baal ambled comfortably along, while my thoughts hovered about this central interest of my life like humming-birds around a honeysuckle. Were we not perfectly wretched apart? for so I, in my ineffable content, put it. Had we not waited two interminable years for parental consent? Why wait any longer?

At this point in my meditations a brown thrush, perched upon the topmost branch of a way-side hickory, burst into an epithalamium, the blithe notes of which came tumbling from out his throat in a perfect cataract of song. We were at the foot of Bad Luck Mountain, near the summit of which, overlooking its sunny sloping lands, stood The Maples. I dropped the reins upon Baal's neck, with permission to go as he pleased, preparatory to a forty-ninth perusal of my precious epistle. As I drew it from my pocket, Miss Dosia's yellow time-stained missive came with it. I was about to thrust the latter back impatiently—for youth, and especially youth in love, admits no interest as paramount to its own immediate affairs—when I was struck by the resemblance between the handwriting of the two addresses. The D in Dosia was precisely, even to the little break in the curve, like the D in Dorothea. And Haddington—well, I could have sworn on the spot that the two Haddingtons had been written by the self-same hand. But that was impossible. The yellow letter with its antique

seal must have been written before Ross, who was twenty-eight, was born, for my father had said, in looking it over, that "that fashion of folding went out of date more than thirty years ago."

As I held the two in my hand, amazed and not a little dazed at this singular resemblance, had I known anything of mesmerism, or been a believer in occult science, I should at once have been convinced that there was some mysterious connection between the two. Almost before I was aware I had put back my own letter and was speculating upon the probable contents of the other. I tried to recall all I had ever heard concerning Miss Dosia. It was not much, for somehow she had been crowded out or had placed herself outside of the every-day life of Haddington for many years. Within my recollection she had been seen but twice at the Corners, both times at dusk—a furtive figure clad in a long camlet cloak and a huge silk bonnet, both of antique pattern.

I had sometimes seen her at work in her garden—of which, it was said, she was very fond—when, as a schoolgirl, I had gone up Bad Luck Mountain to coast or to gather May-flowers. But we girls had never spoken to her. A mysterious atmosphere enveloped her which we shrank from penetrating ; and besides, her avoidance of us was always unmistakable. A few times I had driven to The Maples with my father, and waited in the sulky at the gate while he made his professional visit.

My father knew more about Miss Dosia than any one else, but, like all good physicians, he never gossiped concerning his patients or their affairs. I had heard it said that in early life she had been "disappointed." I had heard the word pronounced laughingly and often jeeringly, never regretfully or pityingly. And now for the first time I asked myself what that word implied. Had she loved some one as I loved Ross, and had he gone away and left her without a word? Had he ceased to love her, while she had gone on loving him until the poor brain was thrown from its just equipoise and she had become what they called "crazy," "cracked," "disappointed"? How could I live on, losing Ross? Oh, if he died I might bear it, remembering his faithful love! But if he ceased to love me! Poor, poor Miss Dosia! And I am not sure that a tear did not fall on that time-stained letter.

But these melancholy reflections came to an abrupt termination, for Baal, well knowing that no house lay beyond, now turned into the avenue of magnificent maples that gave to the place its name. I put the letter back into my pocket, gathered up the reins, winked hard, cleared my throat, and by the time I had reached the horseblock was in fit condition for the fulfilment of my errand.

No one was in sight as I dismounted and entered the gate with its ornate and lofty posts, surmounted by wooden urns, from which Time, the thief, had stolen

every bit of paint. The house, with its closed shutters, was like one asleep, a Rip Van Winkle sleep of half a century, for my mother had once told me that the shutters had been thus closed ever since her remembrance. In a large L at the rear Miss Dosia lived with her nurse, Bathsheba, a wrinkled crone of eighty years.

The garden upon which I entered was an old-fashioned garden, with big bunches of box taller than I, whose pungent odour, coaxed out by the heat of the sun, was almost oppressive. It was the time of roses too, the perfume of which struggled for precedence over that of the box. Great damask-roses clambered over the high encircling stone wall ; white roses dropped their pearly petals on either hand ; there were Burgundy roses, cinnamon and red roses, and blossoming sweetbrier. Everywhere the brown earth laughed out in those dwarf pansies called in old-fashioned phraseology "ladies' delights," while pinks grew in variety and abundance side by side with great golden marigolds that treasured the sun's splendour in their hearts. In a remote corner against a background of evergreen stood a row of superb hollyhocks, creamy, crimson, purple, the haunt of the honey-bees. The garden was neatly kept, its gravelled walks free from disorderly stem or leaf.

I advanced up the main pathway, sentinelled on either side by a close-set squadron of gorgeous tiger-lilies, and was met half-way by a peacock that was

luxuriously sunning himself, strutting up and down with his superb tail spread to its extremest limit.

Near the centre of the garden, in a tangle of lilac and syringa bushes, a grotto had been built, the dome-shaped walls of which were lined with sea-shells. One of the owners of The Maples, in the direct line, was a sea-captain, and this grotto had been his contribution to the attractions of the place. He had brought hither the figure-head of a favourite ship, wrecked off Cape Cod, and placed it upon a pedestal in the centre of this grotto. It was a female figure of wonderful lightness. The head was thrown back as though in the ardour of pursuit, and this action, further emphasized by the backward flow of the draperies, gave the effect of flight, as though, with a lift of hidden wings, the figure was about to rise from its semi-subterranean home into the sunlit azure to which she seemed to belong.

I stopped to look at this naiad of the sea; and as I stood there Miss Dosia came up a path at my left, which path terminated in the apiary, if a half-dozen beehives under the shade of as many quince bushes growing on the lower terrace might be dignified by that name. She wore a short-waisted gown with narrow gored skirt and puffed sleeves of the fashion of her girlhood. It was an embroidered muslin, creamy yellow, brought from the East Indies with many other treasures by the sea-captain before mentioned. On her hat was a long ostrich feather, the elegance and costli-

ness of which were apparent even to my rustic ignorance. She wore long garden gloves, and carried in her hands a set of light garden tools, and but for the singularity of her dress she might have been any lady of modern times with a taste for gardening. Her figure was slight and girlish, and her silvery white, abundant hair curled in a very youthful way around her face. I afterward learned that her black hair had turned to this silvery white before she was twenty. Her eyes were large, soft, and dark, with something of the startled look of a deer when he hears afar off the baying of the hounds.

Aside from the silvery whiteness of her hair, there was no appearance of age about her. Her forehead was a girl's forehead, smooth and free from wrinkles, and her step was light. Upon seeing me she stopped and said, "Good morning," then waited courteously, but not cordially. She offered no hospitalities, did not say, "Will you come in?"

On my part I advanced somewhat awkwardly and presented the letter. "My father sent it," I said, and that was all the explanation I offered. I felt very much as I did last year when Margherita of Italy gave me audience. I felt that I must wait to be spoken to—that royalty had its prerogatives.

Miss Dosia took the letter, and glanced at it indifferently at first. Then, observing perhaps its age, recognizing possibly the handwriting, she tore it open in a kind of frenzy, seemed to devour its contents with a glance, and

the next instant was lying in the pathway, among the white rose petals, in a dead faint. Before I had time to make a step forward, Bathsheba, the old nurse, interposed, and lifting her mistress in her strong, muscular arms as though she were a babe, carried her off into the house, after bestowing upon me a glance of wrathful indignation; and there lay the letter open in the pathway as it had fallen from Miss Dosia's nerveless hand. Was it in mortal woman to resist the temptation offered? I like to think that I might have done so had I not, as I stooped to pick up the letter, read its signature. It was "*Ross Stuyvesant.*"

For a moment I was stunned, bewildered. Was this old garden enchanted ground, and had I fallen under the spell of the witch Bathsheba? I looked fearfully around, and then—I confess it!—I read the letter from beginning to end.

"DEAREST"—it read—"I love you. You must know that I love you. And yet I would like to say it over and over again, as the robin in the spring-time sings it, 'I love you, I love you, I love you.' Happy creature of God in being able to sing it rather than say it! for music is divine, but speech is human. Were my art music instead of painting, I would tell you I love you on this paper in notes that would sing to eye and ear and heart. Red is the divine colour: it is love. Blue is constancy. The mantle of the Madonna is blue; and you, the

Madonna of *my* worship, I remember you oftenest wore blue. You wore it that day we walked under the pines upon the soft brown needles, and the hermit-thrush sung as the sun went down. You wore it the day we sat on the cliff, and together listened to the murmur of the pines, so blended with the chant of the waves that each from each was indistinguishable. So will our lives blend, dearest, if you love me. Do you love me? Will you be my wife? I did not ask you in those sunny summer days when we walked and talked and sketched together. You were sweet, perilously sweet, dearest. But I said, while holding back the words of love that clamoured for speech, I will wait, wait for her to know whether she loves me or not. Now, dearest, you have been at home, in that home about which you told me so much, two long weeks that have seemed like centuries of time to me. Dearest, I hope they have seemed like such to you. And now I ask if you love me. Will you be my wife? And if you should say 'No,' it would not be quite so hard perhaps as to hear it from your lips. But I think you will not. For during those two weeks of centuries I have gone over every moment of the time we were together in that blessed old fishing village. And I think—oh, I think you must have seen how I loved you, and you are too good, too womanly, to have let me go on loving you so if you could not love me. Before I knew you, dearest, I had made plans for work and

travel, and now, if you love me, we will go together, never again to live apart. And we will go first to Italy, where, you know, every artist loves to go for his art's sake; and what a paradise of a home will we make there, my love—my wife! Only one word from you, and I will fly to you. Tell me you love me, for I love you, I love you.

“ROSS STUYVESANT.”

I looked at the date; it was September 20, 1830.

I had barely finished reading when my father stood by my side; so absorbed had I been, I had not noticed his arrival. His eye fell upon the open letter in my hand.

“My daughter,” he began, in a tone of astonishment, “is it possible——”

But I interrupted him vehemently and incoherently. “Oh, don’t, father—don’t say a word; I can’t bear it. Take the letter—take it.” (As I look back upon this scene, I think my tone and action must have been quite that of a tragedy queen, though the tragedy was very real.) “Go to her—go to Miss Dosia; she’s faint or dead, and Bathsheba’s carried her off, and—and——”

He took my hands in his. “Dorothea,” he said, authoritatively—even sternly, as he rarely spoke—“whatever you do, don’t go into hysterics; don’t be a fool. Go home to your mother. It’s been too much for you; I ought to have known better than to send you. Oh, these women, these women!” and he shrugged his shoulders, with a ges-

ture of comic despair. Poor father ! poor doctor ! he had had his physician's share of experience with hysterical women.

I gave him the letter, mounted Baal, who was stamping restlessly at his post, and giving him rein, we dashed down the three miles to the Corners at a pace that brought more than one good farmer's wife to her kitchen door with a face of perplexed inquiry as to what could be the matter. But we did not stop to explain. We galloped on and on, while the purple and gold of early twilight flooded the valleys, and the hermit-thrush sang in "The Hemlocks" as divinely as did his congener in his pines by the sea fifty years before.

That night I wrote a letter to Ross that must have astonished the dear boy. As I remember it, it was an accurate reproduction of the state of my mind—chaotic, bewildered. In it I demanded if he ever had an ancestor or relative by the name of Ross Stuyvesant. If so, was he an artist ? Then I told how this Ross Stuyvesant I was writing him about loved somebody dearly, and wrote a letter to tell her so, which letter she never got till the other day, when she was a woman of seventy, with snow-white hair. And wasn't it "awfully sad" ? But not one word in the letter about love (*our* love, I mean), nor a word about our marriage.

As soon as the mails would permit (thank Heaven ! this is an age of fast mails and telegraphs, and it doesn't take fifty years to get a letter through) I received this answer :

"DOT, MY DARLING,—I reply at once to your inquiries, tho' for the life o' me I don't see what you're at. Isn't one Ross Stuyvesant enough for you, that you must go prospecting for a second, who was fast asleep in his grave ages before you opened your bonny blue eyes on this blessed old world? Yes, I had an uncle Ross Stuyvesant, my father's oldest brother. He died long before I was born. He died in Italy—died young; was an artist; never married; said to have been a handsome fellow whom I greatly resemble! Probably he was the one who wrote the letter to the ancient party" (Ross had had the grace to draw his pen through that bit of slang, without which I could hardly have forgiven him, though, for that matter, he did not know then how lovely and sweet Miss Dosia was)—"beg pardon—old lady. Tho' where the deuce it's been these fifty years I can't imagine. Hope this won't be so long in reaching you.

"But, Dotty, I was expecting another sort of letter from you than this genealogical affair. Dearest, will you not name the day?

"Yours, now and fifty years hence,
"ROSS STUYVESANT."

Miss Dosia never arose from the bed upon which the faithful Bathsheba had laid her that day. My father visited her daily, and one morning told me that she had expressed a wish to see me. As I entered her room she held out her hand and took mine. She patted it gently with her other hand.

"This is the dear hand that brought my letter," she said. "I thank you for it. I did not thank you then. It was long in coming, but it has come at last. And he was true; Ross was true." (These last words were spoken softly as to herself.) "And I am sure that all these years he has known that I was true too. For they know; the dear dead know."

My father had told her about Ross's letter to me, and that *her* Ross Stuyvesant had died long ago.

She lay for a while silent, with closed eyes. In the kitchen the tall old clock ticked loudly, persistently, as it had ticked for a hundred years. Around the morning-glories that clambered over the windows her bees hummed busily. A great Maltese cat, with a blue satin ribbon around her neck, came noiselessly in, and lay down upon the bed by her mistress's side.

She opened her eyes, and turned to me again with a sunny smile. "Your father has told me about *your* Ross, and that he is a nephew of *my* Ross; and if he is like him—and surely he must be—you will be a happy woman. And I am glad for you, dearest, for we women need to be loved and cherished." And then, after another silence, in which she continued to gently pat my hand, she spoke once more. "Kiss me, dearest; and now good-bye. God bless you and Ross!"

I did not see Miss Dosia again. The third morning after my visit I was awakened at sunrise by the tolling of

the meeting-house bell. Haddington still keeps up the old custom of tolling a sunrise bell on the death of one of its inhabitants. Every one had known of her weak condition, and many besides myself counted the seventy strokes that told her age. The deep, resonant notes floated far and wide, and in the distant farm-house as at the Corners, to the dwellers on the hill-tops as well as to those who lived in the valley, it was known that the weary woman had at last entered into her rest.

The gossips at the store speculated concerning her and the coming funeral. The whole subject was gone over, viewed from this side and from that, tossed about like a ball, with no intentional irreverence, be it said, but with a curiosity on the whole kindly — a curiosity having its birth out of the very barrenness of life in this isolated hamlet.

“Who d’ y’ s’pose ’ll git the property now?” questioned Polliwog,

They were circled, as usual, around the cylinder stove, Steve leaning back in his corner, Uncle Pandy alternately nodding and indulging in monologue, the squire placidly smoking, and Polliwog alert and wriggling like his namesake in the shallows of Roaring Brook. Raish was absent. He had hired out for the season at the Popperton Drum Shop, and was running the wooden-toothpick machine. Otherwise there was no change. An outsider, looking in from day to day upon this village

parliament, might have come to the conclusion that its sittings were interminable, that it never "rose."

"D' y' think, squire, if Miss Dosia made a will, it 'll stand in law? Was she of sound mind?" asked Old Ragge.

The squire withdrew his pipe, deliberately. "Waal, it's diffikilt to determine," he replied, with reserve. He was in one of those moods which occasionally possessed him, wherein he felt that legal opinions were worth their weight in good coin, and should not be cheapened by being gratuitously sown broadcast. "I can hardly ventur' an opinion. It is for experts in such matters to determine."

"It's a mighty good property!" ejaculated Polly, appreciatively.

"It's cur'ous," continued Old Ragge. "Now there's property b'longing t' that Belknap estate lyin' off alongside o' Monponsett Medder brook, an' bounded on one side by a line runnin' from a stake an' stones at the so'westerly corner o' the medder sixty-four degrees south an' thirty-three rod west, t' a stake at the corner o' Jim Thomson's medder, that they never had no deed of; ain't got none to this day. It was bought o' the Injins, an' the pesky, shifless critturs never give no deeds, jes sold out f'r a pewter cup or an old red petticoat, 'r some gimcrack 'r other. That shows the Belknaps were a genuine old family—first settlers." And Old Ragge looked around with a pardonable pride in the antiquity of the Belknaps, in which the others doubtless shared, though most

of them would have died rather than betray the fact ; for the current democratic opinion most tenaciously held in Haddington was that everybody was as good as everybody else.

“ Hark ! she bids all her friends adieu ;
Some angel calls her to the spheres ;
Our eyes the radiant saint pursue
Through liquid telescopes of tears.

“ Farewell, bright soul, a short farewell,
Till we shall meet again above,
In the sweet groves where pleasures dwell
And trees of life bear fruits of love.”

Uncle Penty had waked up, and was reciting this monody softly to himself, keeping time with his head and one foot to the rhythm, while his eyes were closed.

“ ‘Riginal poetry, by gosh ! ” ejaculated Steve. And they all stared in a helpless sort of way at the venerable old man.

Poetry did not often invade the sittings of the parliament, and its knowledge of Watts was limited to the *Psalms and Hymns*, dingy-covered copies of which were to be found in most of the pews in the old meeting-house.

Having chanted his monody, Uncle Penty again fell asleep.

“ I s’pose the doctor knows all about who’ll git the property, but he’s mighty close-mouthed,” said Polly, resentfully, thinking of the stores of secrets the doctor must have accumulated during his many years of practice.

"But they dew say," he added, in a livelier manner, and indiscreetly hastening to impart a bit of information which he knew, in the nature of things, must as yet be unknown to the others—"they dew say that the young feller the doctor's darter's a goin' t' marry is newew t' the one that writ that letter Miss Dosia got. They say 'twas writ fifty year ago; an' 't has been in somebody's coat pocket ever sence. They say an old rag-peddler found it an' mailed it at a ventur'."

"Oh, psho! that's one o' your lies, Polly," said Steve, coming down on the front legs of his chair with a crash, as he reached out for Old Ragge's head of tobacco, off which he cut a huge piece, carefully manipulating it with one hand in the hollowed palm of the other, preparatory to refilling his pipe. "I don't know what's goin' t' become o' you 'f you keep on, Polly; it'll take mor'n Parson Richmond t' get you through straight."

"Lies!" ejaculated Polly, in his indignation precipitately betraying himself. "I guess I got it right straight from head-quarters; heered the doctor say so myself this mornin' when I was waitin' 'n the kitchen f'r arniky f'r my rheumatiz. They was eatin' breakfast, and the kitchen door happened t' be open jest a crack."

"An' I s'pose your ear didn't happen t' go up t' that crack n'r nothin'," dryly remarked Steve.

Polly blushed, mumbled something, and was silent. It was even worse

than Steve's remark had intimated. The "arniky" itself had only been a pretext for gaining entrance to the doctor's house for possible information.

* * * *

"Waal, I declare for't, Mehitabel, if this ain't you! and how upon earth did y' get here? y' don't say y' walked?"

"Yes; me an' Benjamin was determined to come, an' Benjamin he couldn't get a horse for love or money. Everybody was hitched up to come to th' funeral. So we jest set to an' walked. An' I hauled the baby, an' Benjamin he snaked Julia."

The speaker was panting for breath, and her face was crimson with the exertion of "hauling the baby," for it was three "mile," as she would have put it, from their habitation to The Maples.

It was in the avenue at The Maples that this brief colloquy took place on the morning of the funeral. Others besides Benjamin and Mehitabel were arriving. As far as the eye could see down the road leading up to Bad Luck Mountain was a long line of vehicles ascending, while foot-passengers lined the road on either side. The whole population within a radius of five miles were *en route* to the funeral. Such an opportunity as this, they argued, to see the inside of The Maples might never offer itself again to this generation, and they, like Benjamin and Mehitabel, were "determined" to improve it. So long had Miss Dosia's gates been closed

to the outside world that to be permitted to enter them was gratifying to the spirit of exploration which seems inherent in the human race. Stanley did not look forward with greater enthusiasm to his plunge into the Dark Continent than did these country folk to the possible surprises awaiting them in the unknown land lying within the walls of The Maples.

They were destined to a partial disappointment, it is true, for Bathsheba declined to open any part of the house aside from that occupied for so many years by Miss Dosia and herself in the great L. But these good though inquisitive people readily reconciled themselves to this loss, and made the most of what was left.

And so they came and hitched their horses to the maples all along down the broad avenue, and picketed them out in the adjoining fields, and crowded Miss Dosia's well-kept paths, and packed every inch of the ample L, with the exception of the room wherein she lay in all the loveliness of the eternal youth upon which she had entered.

An enemy could have seized that day upon the whole of Haddington, without meeting the slightest resistance, for every house, with the exception of two or three wherein lay helpless sick, was empty. Even the Vickerys came, the pariahs of that region, who seldom crawled out of their lair in the valley on the other side of the mountain—a valley which bore the suggestive and sulphurous name of Sodom—except on a thieving

expedition. The father of this numerous family could read a little, but the mother was ignorant of the alphabet, and it was one of the amusements of the former, when their eldest born, Jim, had grown up and gone to sea, to read professedly from some stray newspaper a heart-rending account of a shipwreck, ending with, "and these be the names of the drowned, James Vickery, etc." Thereat the poor woman, having, despite her wretched life, a mother's heart in her bosom, would cry out lamentably. He was one of those human beings whose existence renders possible such creations as Dickens's *Quilp*.

These did not venture within the gates, but contented themselves with thrusting their unkempt heads, set with wild eyes, above the walls. Ross, who regarded everything with an artist's eye, was pleased with the "effect." "They might be Bedouin Arabs of the desert," he said. But the people were scandalized at the appearance of these outlaws, and Polliwog, just returning from a visit of inspection around the premises, in which he had counted the beehives and cucumbers, tested the quality of the strawberries, and explored the barns and cellars, was for calling out a constable and arresting them for their unseemly curiosity. But the doctor interposed. "Let them alone," he said; "they harm nobody, and they may get some good."

After the services were over they carried Miss Dosia out and laid her

under the shade of the late-blossoming roses for each to pass by and look upon. And so the long procession moved slowly on, down the broad pathway and out through the gates, and old women and fair-haired matrons, young girls and little children, white-haired men who had known her in the hey-day of her beauty, stalwart fathers of families, young men, and babes carried high in the arms of their mothers, each looked upon the fair sweet face, which seemed to breathe upon each a parting benediction. And then she was borne down to the old family tomb in the ancient "garden of God," and being laid therein, the door was closed and sealed, for she was the last of her race.

When it was known in Haddington that Miss Dosia had left her property, with the exception of a comfortable annuity to Bathsheba, to the doctor's daughter, the satisfaction was universal, and the public sentiment voiced itself as usual at the village store.

"She done jest right," declared Old Ragge in his shrillest treble. "He ain't a Belknap, an' he never *can* be; but he's a fust-rate man, the doctor is—ain't got a mean drop o' blood in him. An' Dot"—for so was the doctor's daughter affectionately designated in her native town—"Dot is a chip o' th' old block. S'pose it's all right—ain't it, squire? Can't break th' will, can they? Though, fr that matter, there an't nobody *tew* break it, as I know."

"Waal," responded the squire summing up the matter judiciously

♦

"Miss Belknap couldn't be called crazy egzactly. She was—a—a——" (monomaniac was probably the polysyllable he was after, but he failed to catch it), "as I have observed, she was a—a—crazy on one p'int only, and was therefore capable of makin' a will, and it will probably stand in law. It's a harnsome property."

"An' that artist feller 'll be mighty glad t' git it. Them fellers don't git much money makin' pictur's, I guess. Pictur's are dretful cheap things;" and Old Ragge cast a disparaging glance upon a flaming chromo tacked upon the smoky brown wall. It was "Love among the Roses," a copy of which was advertised to be given away with every pound of Oolong tea bought at the store. "He's a lucky chap t' git Dot an' the whole Belknap property throwed in."

"Wonder how much 'tis?" queried Polliwog.

One midsummer's day Ross and I went through the old house which had been so strangely bequeathed to me. The dust lay thick upon furniture and carpets, and, jarred by our passing footsteps, dropped from the faded, moth-eaten draperies. Upon a table in one of the parlours, on a small easel, stood a painting of a young girl in a blue gown. In the lower right-hand corner we read, "Ross Stuyvesant, August, 1830." It was the portrait of the girl Dosia by her artist lover.



OLIVE.





OLIVE.

I.

IT may have been the colour of her plumage, *i.e.*, the Quaker-like tints of her dress, or it may have been the gentleness so marked in face and manner that made you always think of a dove when you looked at Olive.

Whether she was nursing poor worn-out Mrs. Hamilton's eighth baby through an attack of croup, or devoutly listening to the exposition of Parson Reynolds' ninth head, or gently repressing the hands of Johnny who was endeavouring to relieve the monotony of the nine heads by measuring the back of stout Mrs. Acorn in the pew in front, with a string from that museum, his trousers' pocket—she looked the same placid, unruffled creature, at least to the superficial eye. A closer inspection might have detected a slight droop in the corners of the sweet mouth.

But if you had not known her story, it could only have been on general grounds that you would have suspected

the tragedy of her life. Most lives have their tragedy, though happily transmuted in rare cases into comedy, as in Hero's.

Olive had not always worn the plumage of the dove. Other and gayer feathers had been hers in those days when she led the dance in the ball-room of the old tavern. But at the period of the opening of this story her dancing days had long been over. They had ceased abruptly some thirty years before. She was now a church-member. But she had never been able to bring herself to regard dancing as the wicked thing so many of her co-religionists declared it to be. Because Herodias' daughter danced off John the Baptist's head, was there to be no more cakes and ale?

She had loved it together with many other innocent things in her flowery springtime. She was in the habit of taking occasional excursions back into that enchanted period, especially in the twilight, when her wood-fire was at its brightest and before the lamp was lighted. And in none of its pleasant places did she linger longer and oftener than at a certain ball.

It was a military as well as a May-day ball, and George, as captain of the Militia Light Infantry Company, was in his uniform of blue and scarlet and white, and as he walked, his sword clanked in true soldierly fashion.

Olive remembered her feeling of pride as, leaning on his arm, they two swept in at the head of the procession

of dancers—into the long, low-ceiled hall with its polished floor of hard pine. Benches lined the walls, and the hall was lighted with a row of small, round lamps. Wreaths of princess- and ground-pine, and branches of evergreens mingled with flags and streamers made a bower of the place, and the fragrance of the exquisite mayflowers mingled with the scent of hemlock and white pine.

It was the eve of the Maytraining, always an important occasion in Mantit, and as usual there had been a large gathering of the lesser lads and lasses during the day on the Green to watch the evolutions, and to partake of “muster-cake”—a species of rusk with a fat “plum” in the centre of each square—huge piles of which were for sale on the counters of the store.

At Mantit assemblies and balls they danced commonly to no more than two fiddles at the outside ; but at the annual military ball not only was a third fiddle added, but also a trombone, and Kendal, the famous bugle-player, was sent for from Boston. Kendal consumed enormous quantities of snuff, but his playing was divine ; and the bugle solo in “Wood-up Quickstep” always brought down the house. On this occasion the benches reserved for spectators were well filled, mostly by elderly men, who oscillated between ball-room and bar-room, in which latter place were apples and candies for sale, together with excellent cider.

Olive had had a gown made especially

for the ball, a white tartan over pink cambric. She had never worn it afterwards. It had been packed away in a chest in the garret, where she sometimes saw it, a ghost of the past, the pink of its cambric faded and streaked, and the white of its tartan yellow as the linen of an Egyptian mummy.

George had whispered how pretty it was and how becoming, as they went down the middle hand in hand in "Fishers' Hornpipe." One of the pink tea roses—grown in a cracked sugar-bowl in the congenial atmosphere of the kitchen—dropped from her hair in "Money-Musk," and George quickly transferred it to a buttonhole of his scarlet coat.

It was observed that they danced together a greater part of the time, which was not considered etiquette, but was forgiven on the ground that this was George's last night in Mantit for a whole year.

No engagement between the two had been announced. They did not "announce" in those days. But it was as well understood that at the end of the year the two were to be married, as though a column of the *Old Colony Spy* had been devoted to the subject. George had "waited upon" Olive ever since he was big enough and old enough to wait upon anybody. He was not noted for his adhesiveness; in fact, he was considered as rather of the rolling-stone order. But he had stuck to Olive so far with unfailing loyalty.

How full of fine jest and happy talk

he was that night ! He was going away on the morrow, to be sure, but it was to better fortunes, and the goal was—Olive ! And how full of tenderness, especially in the drive home after the ball was over ! It was late, or rather, early, and there was a chorus of blue-birds and robins and red linnets in the woods at Thompson's Corner as they drove slowly by. For they did not hurry, and Brown Bess had ample time and opportunity to crop the tender foliage of the low birches by the wayside, and to reflect on its succulence. She rambled from side to side with a judicial eye to the juiciest morsels, and the buggy tilted to and fro, and the lovers, happy in the present and indulging in joyous forecasts of the future, forgot they were not Phyllis and Corydon on a substantial bank under a tree. They were aroused to a sense of their situation by a voice that shouted, "Hulloo there ! look out or you'll be over !"—and found themselves on the verge of the deep wayside ditch.

George gathered up the reins, while Olive laughed and blushed.

The speaker turned about and looked after the buggy. "Poor little girl !" he said to his companion—he was an old man with white hair. "Poor little girl ! I'm afraid she'll be disapp'inted in that young feller. He's handsome enough to look at, and good-natur'd enough. But he ain't got any backbone. You can jest twist him round your finger if you want to."

"He's a chip o' the old block," re-

sponded the other. "His father never stuck to nothin', an' run out a handsome property before he died. He'd no faculty except for spendin', and there he couldn't be beat. And he would alwa's have the best of everything. He packed his pork best pieces to the top, so's when he went down into the barrel, he'd alwa's be eatin' the best. Folks that packed t'other way, he used to say, was always eatin' the worst. But by the time he got to the bottom his best was mighty poor, I reckon. An' jest the same way with his apples—pickin' out the best, an' leavin' the bruised an' specked ones; an' by spring, when other folks had a good supply, his were all gone."

"Well, I'm sorry for Olive. She's an excellent good girl; too good to be throwed away. But, mebbe, she'll keep him straight."

"I pity the woman that's got her husband to keep straight. She's got a mighty hard row to hoe," was the sententious reply.

So the ravens of prophecy croaked, but their croaking mattered little to the lovers. They did not hear, and would only have laughed if they had.

But Brown Bess was permitted to crop no more wayside herbage; for other early risers were abroad, chopping wood at the farmhouse doors, or swinging their shining tin pails on the way to the milking yards.

George said "good-bye" at the gate, and Olive, standing in the west porch, watched the buggy out of sight. She

then went in, not to go to bed, but to change her white tarltan for an everyday print, and to get ready the breakfast. Her mother had long been in delicate health, and had given both household cares and work into Olive's hands. She stepped briskly about without sign of fatigue, humming a tune and smiling to herself, now and then crossing the kitchen with a skip and a slide, as though again going down the middle with George in "Fishers' Hornpipe." The world looked to her that day as it has looked to lovers ever since the first morning dawned on Adam and Eve in Eden. "A brave new world," says Miranda.

II.

In five months from that time news came of George's marriage to the daughter of his employer, and Olive's dream of happiness was over. She saw him once afterwards, at Thanksgiving time, when he brought his bride to his mother's.

"George has fetched his wife home," her father said to her Thanksgiving morning, as he was getting out his shaving-box preparatory to taking off his "baird." He commonly shaved but once a week, on Sunday morning, except on Fast, Thanksgiving, and Election days. "Perhaps you won't care to go to meeting to-day, Olive?"

"I don't know why not, father. I never did stay away Thanksgiving Day, and they'll want me in the anthem,"

replied Olive. There was a fine colour in her cheeks as she spoke, and her father, softly whetting his razor on the shabby old strop, felt that women were a puzzle.

Now he would have said that it would just about have killed Olive to have George marry some other body. And yet he couldn't see as she was one mite the worse. She went about her work as cheerful as ever, even cheerfuller. And she ate her victuals well—at least, she didn't say "no" to a second helping. To be sure she sat in her mother's place behind the sugar-bowl and cream pitcher, and he couldn't see her plate. But she plied her knife and fork diligently. He couldn't help feeling glad that she did take the disappointment so easily; for, he argued, it must be to some degree a disappointment. Her mother, who said nothing, but who followed Olive with wistful eyes from the couch where she lay, doubtless saw clearer. And when Olive came down dressed for church, she kissed her with even more than her usual tenderness.

She was a radiant creature that day, and many admiring glances were cast upon her from the pews in the west gallery where the young men sat. As soon as a boy had passed a certain age, and began to raise whiskers, he abandoned the paternal pew below and took to the west gallery. The choir sat in the south gallery, which ran the length of the ancient meeting-house, and in the two corners of which were the "nigger seats," arrangements not unlike theatre

boxes. These were untenanted, however, except by wasps, and were a relic of the time when Massachusetts held slaves, prior to the Revolution.

Olive sung treble, and led that section of the choir. Her voice was of excellent quality, pure and sweet; and it rose and floated about in the region of the rafters and sounding-board after a fashion that poor George, sitting beside his bride in his mother's pew, thought little short of seraphic.

“ On cherub and on cherubim
Full royally he rode,
And on the wings of mighty winds
Came flying all abroad.
And on the wings of mighty winds,
of mighty winds,
And on the wings of, wings of ——”

and so on and on, in seemingly inextricable yet well-ordered confusion. And the fiddles screamed, and the 'cello boomed, and the clarionet made wild snatches at the air, and the leading bass swayed from side to side like a tall pine in a blast, and the leading tenor, a diminutive man, a dwarf beside the giant bass, emitted an extraordinary volume of sound, and above it all, like Miriam's voice over the Israelitish host, soared that clear sweet treble, with not a tremor in it.

George observed that fact. He sat where he could see Olive easily, without turning his head. Not only was there no tremor in her voice, but it even had a triumphant ring. And oh, how surpassingly beautiful she was! She had

black hair, and eyes of a warm hazel that deepened and brightened under excitement. Her brown cheeks were flushed, and as she sang you could just see the edges of her white teeth, and the dimples come and go. Her head was thrown back, somewhat proudly, perhaps, showing the round white throat that throbbed with her song like that of the thrush.

She wore a bonnet of the prevailing fashion, a cottage bonnet I think it was called, tied closely under the chin, and filled in around the face with soft pink roses. An awkward bonnet, doubtless, compared with that of the present mode, but, your grandfather would assure you, the most bewitching bonnet the world ever saw.

Olive did not look down upon the faces in the pews. Her eyes were fixed on the ceiling or on her notes. Nevertheless she saw George and his bride distinctly. The latter was a small round creature, with peach-bloom cheeks, curling hair of light gold, and eyes of heavenly blue. Her mouth was a rosebud, her nose a trifle broad and coarse. Altogether a kittenish little thing, made to cuddle and to pet—so would have said an inexperienced observer; but really of that type, so gentle and submissive in appearance, that proves so disappointing in marriage, and which, in accordance with the nature of kittens, develops an extraordinary capacity for clawing and scratching.

She nestled confidently at George's side, while he, poor fellow, utterly

oblivious of her, could only gaze at Olive. The young men in the west gallery observed the expression of his face, and dug their elbows into each other's ribs suggestively. It was easy to see that he had already tired of his bargain, and good enough for him! But the majority of the congregation, noting the amount of expensive jewellery the bride had managed to distribute about her small person, judged that George had done a good thing for himself pecuniarily.

That night, as Olive was sitting by the fire looking into it absently, the pink gone from her cheek, and the light from her eyes, she heard something that brought them back in a flash. It was "Polly, put the kettle on," whistled softly outside.

That had been George's signal—an intimation that he was in her neighbourhood—ever since they trudged to school together, and shared the excellent lunches put up by her mother for both. In those days it meant, "Come on Olive, and let's go skating, coasting, huckleberrying, setting traps, fishing, bird's-nesting;" and as they grew older, "It's time for the spelling-school, the candy-pull, the skating meet on the mill-pond, or for a thousand innocent pleasures; and here am I, your knight, your squire, what you will, ready to do your bidding."

Six months before Olive would have been on her feet in an instant, and at the door, peering out into the dark with smiling eyes, and beckoning to George

to come in. But now she hesitated. She looked at her father. He, excellent man, was deep in a sermon on "The Perseverance of the Saints," by his favourite preacher in the Old Colony Association, the Reverend Ignatius Prince. He was plentifully larding its pages with tallow from the candle he held in his right hand. He always read by a candle held in his hand, and often approached it dangerously near the paper. At such times a sudden blaze betrayed the point of contact. Olive always kept an eye upon him when reading, but she felt in a measure off duty when the sermons were under perusal. Whether through the more solid nature of their contents, or the superior thickness of the paper, they did not ignite so readily as the *Old Colony Spy*.

Lost in contemplation of the welfare of the saints, he was utterly oblivious of the miserable sinner without whistling, with despair in his heart—

"Polly, put the kettle on,
And we'll all take tea."

Still Olive hesitated, held by a feeling it is difficult to analyse. It was not from a sense of the impropriety of answering the signal, now that the relation between George and herself was so changed. It would have been impossible, in fact, for her to have admitted an impropriety. She loved him. She had always loved him; and she could not imagine any circumstances wherein she should ever

cease to love him. And he loved her. If she had doubted that when she first heard of his defection, she did so no longer. She had read the truth in his face that day. Why should she, then, refuse to respond to the familiar signal?

She had never been blind to his weakness of will. Love is not blind. It is a masquerading love that refuses to see, not the true son of divinity. She understood, too, the type to which that kittenish creature, his wife, belonged. She knew, as only a woman can know, with what soft purrings and gentle luring of those heavenly blue eyes she had drawn him within her reach, and then pounced upon him, so to speak, like a cat upon a mouse, patting him hither and thither with her soft paws, bewildering his senses, and putting to sleep his better nature.

She knew, too, that he would never be able to retrieve his false step; to make the best of his terrible mistake as a man of stronger nature might. Over her own ruined hopes fragrant flowers might bloom in time, and tender creepers twine. But for George's future there could be no such ameliorating, beautifying process. In the arid atmosphere of a loveless marriage, a marriage whose only bond was a momentary passion, all of good in him must decay.

At this thought a great overwhelming wave of pity swept over her, and running out and down the path with outstretched arms, they met, and stood for one brief moment in the old embrace of affection.

Then Olive drew back. "Oh, George, I pity you, I do pity you!" she said.

"I wish I was dead, Olive," responded the poor fellow, with a groan. "I wish I'd never gone away from you. I hate her. I don't see how I ever come to marry her. Yes, I do," he added, fiercely. "She flung herself at me, and I thought it would be a fine thing to cut out the other fellows. Oh, what a fool I've been! and how I love you, Olive! and now I've lost you."

He again stretched out his arms to her, but she only took his hands in hers. "Yes, George," she said. But her voice was like a sad embrace.

"I can't tell you how I felt, Olive, when I saw you up there in the gallery to-day. You looked so good and sweet and true. I always knew I wasn't good enough for you. But I never thought I should do like this. Oh, Olive, I can't bear to lose you!"

And again he would have taken her in his arms. But Olive withdrew her hands from his and said, "Good-bye, George."

"But, Olive, won't you speak to me? Why won't you talk to me as you used to? You were always so merry and sweet, and she — O God! what a fool I've been!"

And what could Olive say? Between her love and her pity she felt her heart was breaking. Something seemed to suffocate her; she could scarcely breathe.

"Good-bye, George," she said again, but hardly above a whisper. "I do love

you ; I shall always love you. But I must go in now."

"But won't you kiss me once more, Olive? It's the last time. I know very well it won't do for me to come and see you again like this. But give me one kiss, Olive ; it's the last."

Had Olive been possessed of that New England conscience, of which we hear so much in these latter days, she would doubtless, after carefully analysing and ticketing each emotion, have refused to kiss this husband of another woman. But not possessing any such conscience—in which, as a distinct species, I, for one, decline to believe—being the possessor of the ordinary human conscience only, she saw no wrong in complying with the entreaty of her old playmate and comrade, whom she had loved, with her father's and mother's approbation, openly and freely.

So the kiss was given and taken. And then she turned away and walked slowly into the house. George waited until he saw her shadow pass across the white window shade as she went back to her seat by the fire, and then he, too, turned away and went out through the gate feeling—how does a man feel when he goes down into hell?

III.

All this was thirty years before the time indicated in the opening paragraph of this story. And Olive had fought her battle, and won, as all earnest fighters will in the end. As I have

intimated, marks of the conflict might have been detected by a careful observer. But she had come out with her sweet, wholesome nature unspoiled.

Her father and mother had died, and she was sole proprietor of the ancient homestead, a comfortable house of the old New England order, with bedrooms above where you could hear the rain patter upon the roof, and a bewildering maze of rooms on the ground floor, the original building having been added to from time to time by the generation in possession, and with jutting porches and butteries ; a house altogether too large for one solitary old maid, some said. For Olive had come to be enrolled in that honoured sisterhood of which the world is not worthy, and without which the married portion would find it extremely difficult to get on.

But she was by no means a solitary old maid. The hospitable doors of her house stood always open, and in time there came to be a permanent visitor or two; Simple Nance, who would have been knocked off to the lowest bidder, had not Olive interposed. For Mantit had no almshouse, and its few paupers—at that time Nance's was the sole name on the list—were bid off at the town-meeting by that individual who would board them at the lowest rate. This bidding off was regarded as a fine jest, and much small wit was usually expended thereupon.

Olive on this occasion had "raided" the meeting-house, which also served as town-house, rather to the scandal of

the community. For there was as yet but little talk, and that of a random kind, concerning the rights of women. A few wives felt the injustice of the law that refused them the control of their own property, and the doctor's wife had been heard to say that for her part she saw no good reason why a woman should not go to college as well as a man. But as to voting and attending town-meeting—so revolutionary an idea had never entered their heads.

But Olive, when she learned that Simple Nance was to be bid off that day at town-meeting, did not stop to question the propriety of her action. She put on her bonnet and appeared before her astonished townsmen, barely discernible through the fog of tobacco smoke that enveloped them. Proceedings for the bidding off of Nance had already begun.

"I'll take her," said Olive, as soon as she could get her breath, and somewhat flurried with the haste she had made lest she should be too late.

"Twenty-five cents a week ! twenty-five, twenty-five, twenty-five !" shouted the auctioneer. "Twenty-five cents ! Who says twenty-three ?" looking at Olive.

"I'll take her for nothing," said Olive ; at which bid the auctioneer, somewhat nonplussed, dropped his hammer and stared about him.

"You can't get lower'n that, Sam, unless you'll give something to have her," he remarked to the twenty-five cent bidder.

So Simple Nance was knocked off into Olive's wise and gentle keeping, to be trained into respectable womanhood. She was the unfortunate child of a wretched mother, who had deserted her, leaving her at the age of eight "on the town." Simple she was in mind; always a child in intellect; "one of the least" of Christ's brethren, but with a power of loyal affection the greatest of His disciples might have envied.

"That creatur'," remarked Uncle Peter, "would lay down and let Miss Olive walk over her. In fact she'd *like* to do it. She's jest like old Tige there: kick him and he'll come back and lick y'r boot. Though I don't mean to insinuate that Miss Olive 'd walk over her or any other human bein', to say nothin' o' kickin'. If the Lord's angels do come down and walk upon this 'arth, she's one of 'em."

Uncle Peter, old and rheumatic, was another member of the household, and it will be seen that Olive was not without honour among her own people.

A later addition had been made in the person of the irrepressible Johnny, whom we have met before in the course of this narrative engaged in surveying Mrs. Acorn's broad back.

Many other children frequented the house, and it was Olive who re-covered their balls, bound up their cut fingers, and even put a patch now and again upon dilapidated jackets and trousers, much to the relief of overtasked mothers.

That she was the chosen confidante of the young girls goes without saying.

For to such does a motherly old maid most commend herself.

But above all her heart and home welcomed those whom nobody else wanted. Even the Widder Asy, who lived largely by visiting, and whose love of scandal and mischief-making made her presence in most households so intolerable, was frequently invited to visit Olive.

"Poor thing! I pity her. Nobody wants her, and it must be dreadful not to be wanted," said Olive to the doctor, apologetically. He was sitting by the window where he could see the Widder Asy coming up the garden path.

"For my part," replied the doctor, "I'd as lief see the seven-year pestilence coming to my house as the Widder Asy. But I believe, Olive, you'd take in the devil out o' pity, if nobody else wanted him."

So the years had moved on, and all memory of George had faded from this small world. He was apparently forgotten by all save Olive. She never forgot. She remembered him as we remember our dead, forgetful of all that ever gave grief or pain. His kindness of heart and generous impulses, his affectionate nature, his merry jests, his brightness, his manly beauty, made up the fair image enshrined in her memory.

IV.

One day in late April Mrs. Acorn, taking observations from her sitting-

room window, saw Simple Nance come out and hail the stage-coach. Nance had a band-box in her hand, which she passed up to the driver. Olive followed with Uncle Peter carrying an umbrella and basket. Johnny and Tige, after the fashion of pages, brought up the rear.

Uncle Peter opened the coach door and let down the steps. Olive got in, the steps were re-folded, and the door shut. The driver cracked his whip, the leader gave a plunge, and the stage-coach rolled away. Nance wiped her eyes on her apron, Johnny bellowed, and Uncle Peter kicked Tige, who howled melodiously.

Mrs. Acorn, seeing and hearing all this from her sitting-room window, was filled with wonder. Where could Olive be going—Olive, who never went anywhere? Intent upon satisfying her curiosity, she threw her apron over her head and stepped over to Aunt Sally's. But Aunt Sally was as ignorant as herself, and an express, in the person of her youngest son, 'Ratio, was sent on a fruitless quest around the neighbourhood for information.

Mrs. Acorn had some thought of going in and questioning Nance. But remembering certain futile attempts of the same nature she refrained. Uncle Peter, she reflected, was even more difficult of access than Nance, and had been suspected on more than one occasion of setting Tige—by some telegraphic communication intelligible only to that faithful beast—upon people who

he thought had come for a like purpose. There was nothing for it but to wait. And to those who wait, we are often reminded, opportunity comes in due time.

Mrs. Acorn's opportunity came that afternoon. The parish sewing-circle met, and as soon as the work was distributed, and the needles threaded, she delivered herself of her observations and asked what they could mean. Exclamations of surprise followed, such as, "You don't say so!" "Well I never!" and various theories were on the point of being propounded, when the doctor's wife cut them short by saying she could explain. In fact, she had Olive's authority for doing so.

Olive desired that all her friends should know of the addition about to be made to her household. She had gone to Providence, Rhode Island, to fetch George Harris. She had received a letter the day before stating that a man of that name was ill in one of the hospitals there, and in great want. In his possession an old letter had been found signed Olive Parmenter. Its postmark was Mantit, Massachusetts, and the officials had ventured to write to that address, thinking he might have friends who would gladly come to his relief. Olive, as they knew from Mrs. Acorn's observations, had gone at once, and would return in two days.

"George Harris!" exclaimed half a dozen of the younger women. "Who's George Harris?"

"Oh!" ejaculated half a dozen older

ones, who had danced "Fishers' Hornpipe" on a memorable occasion, and remembered a certain white tartan over pink cambric. And there was an immediate interchange of opinions.

They all agreed that her prompt action was "just like Olive." The older ones remembered that she "set her eyes by George," and that he, though a good-natured fellow enough, was terribly "shifty-minded" about everything *but* Olive. He'd always stuck to her, and it was a great surprise when he married "that Pautucket woman." But "out o' sight, out o' mind," that was the way with some folks. "Men were deceitful ever," said Carline Scratchit, who was one of the sisterhood of old maids of whom the world *is* worthy. "Put not your trust in that lying sex," had always been her motto.

Whereupon Mrs. Acorn remarked, in a subdued voice to her neighbour, that there "wasn't a man near her own age that Carline hadn't set her cap for, including her (Mrs. Acorn's) own Joshua. And that it was "well known that she'd 'a' took up with any man that would 'a' had her."

The sweet charities of social life were not unknown in Mantit. Neither were its asperities.

But on the whole the gossip of the sewing-circle was of a kindly nature, and it was unanimously the opinion that Olive had done the right thing. She had plenty, and could take care of George just as well as not, which

seemed to these good folk, in their simplicity, a sufficient reason why she should do so.

Was it likely he'd live long? Did the doctor's wife know? She knew nothing but what she had told them. Olive hoped they would ask no questions. If George was able to see them she would like his old friends to come in. That was all.

Meanwhile Uncle Peter, Simple Nance, and Johnny, talked of nothing but the coming guest, in which conversation Tige joined with a brief bark, or tail-tap, at points where it came within the scope of his understanding.

"Tell me again about him, Uncle Peter," said Nance. "He's handsome?"

"Handsome as a pictur', Nance."

"Blue eyes?"

"Blue as vi'lets, Nance."

"And curly brown hair?"

"Jest like a spaniel dog's."

Bark from Tige, who knows "dog."

"And tall and straight, Uncle Peter?"

"Tall an' straight as a pine, Nance, an' such a figger! Lord, how he would go down the middle! I was stable-boy at the old tavern then, an' after they'd all got there, an' the hosses were put up an' grained, I'd go up a spell into the hall an' look on. Golly, Nance! you'd ought t' seen Miss Olive in them days! She ain't bad to look at now, but wa'n't she a buster then! the handsomest girl in the hall, by a long chalk, an' as light

on her feet as a sparrer, takin' little mincin' steps pat to the fiddle. An' dressed ! You don't see nothin' like it now." And Uncle Peter wagged his old head mournfully over the degeneracy of the fashions. Which Tige, interpreting as one of his many signals, responded to with a tap of his stub of a tail.

"And he loved Miss Olive ?"

"Jest worshipped the ground she trod on."

"And Miss Olive loved him ?"

"Yes, she did, Nance, she did. There was no doubt o' that. It's unaccountable how a woman can love such a crittur as a man. But they do."

"And then he went away and married somebody else ?"

"Yes, if there ever was a rampagēous idgit, it was George Harris. But there—there ! Men are all fools more or less ; fools when they do marry an' fools when they don't. An' mostly hitchin, on to the wrong woman."

Nance's face wore a pained look.

"And did Miss Olive feel very bad ?" she asked.

"I expect she did, Nance. She didn't dance no more, and after a spell she exper'enced religion. An' folks don't generally exper'ence religion till most other things are bust up. An', Nance, I've noticed one thing, for I obsarve, Nance, I obsarve. Miss Olive don't seem real unhappy, but she don't laugh. She smiles, an' nobody could be cheerfuller. But I've obsarved that when folks are real happy, and nothin' weigh-

in' on their minds, they laugh. An' Miss Olive was a merry creatur' when George Harris was a-courtin' her. Merry as a bobolink a-tiltin' on a clover spray. I can seem to hear it now, that laugh o' hern. Get out, Tige, you pesky crittur!" Tige dodged the boot and then returned to his place, cocking his cropped ears intelligently. He understood perfectly well that Uncle Peter's kicks meant no malice. They were simply a relief to over-charged feeling.

"And will he know Jack the Giant-Killer, and how to string kites?" put in Johnny.

"There's no doubt of it, youngster," replied Uncle Peter, indulgently.

"And p'r'aps he can make boats too, Uncle Peter." A shallow, rapid brook flowed past the garden, out of which Johnny had to be fished and dried once a day on an average.

Everything about the house was in spick-and-span order on the day of Olive's return. Nance, with a glimmering idea that it was not unlike a bridal occasion, had done her very best. The fact that there had been a time in the life of her beloved mistress when she was unhappy, had made a deep impression on her simple mind. Now perhaps the old joy was coming back with the return of the handsome young man, tall and straight as a pine, with blue eyes like vi'lets, and curly brown hair. Out of what Uncle Peter had told her she had constructed a picture of him in her mind, and it is difficult to

say whether she or Mrs. Acorn, who was at her window of observation as the stage stopped, experienced the greater shock at the sight of the stooping gray-haired man, who stepped slowly out, and, leaning on Olive's arm, walked feebly up the path to the door.

"George Harris! that George Harris! says I to myself, when I see him. Good gracious! why, he looks a hundred! Now, he must be about your age, Joshua, and you're a young man yet!"

Joshua was keenly conscious of his stiff joints and of the shiny smoothness of his cranium, especially when a draught struck him. Nevertheless he was pleased that his wife thought him still a young man. Verily, though Love be not blind, he has a kindly habit of occasionally shutting his eyes.

George Harris had lived a hard and reckless life, so Olive came to learn by degrees. She had at first shrunk from hearing all that he wished to tell her. But she soon saw that it was a necessary relief to a mind oppressed by a sense of sin, and at the same time loathing its remembrance, and longing to be cleansed therefrom. Confession is good for the soul when it is poured into the ear of one who loves the sinner.

So she sat day by day quietly listening to the story of a life such as in her pure imagination she had never even dreamed of. After ceaseless bickerings George's wife had left him, ran off with another man, and after that he too "went to

the bad," so he said. But we will not dwell upon the details. Each can imagine them for himself, or what is better, pass them by as one passes a slimy, ill-smelling pool, with head turned away, fearful of inhaling the poisonous atmosphere.

The confession over, Olive said, "Think no more of all that, George. Let it go. It is past. It is with God as the past of all of us is. He only can judge us."

Comforting thought, though so often presented as one of terror.

"I once heard a good man say that it is the best that is in us that is our real self, not the worst. And you were good in those old days, George, and that was your real self." And so with loving words and gentlest ministrations she led him away from the old trains of thought, and her greatest helper was Johnny.

Old friends came in with hearty greetings, and talked about the weather and the crops and the coming election, with now and then a pleasant allusion to "old times." But from these he visibly shrank, turning to Johnny with his kites and his boats, his minnow fishing, and his tale of Old Speckle, who had been found deep down in a hole in the mow, sitting on seventeen eggs; his hopes concerning the skates provisionally promised for his eighth birthday, and a host of other interests equally important and absorbing. Happy ministration of children! To the sore heart there is no companion-

ship at once so consoling and so strengthening.

Johnny's happy prattle aroused no sleeping memories, touched no sensitive bruises. Helping him plan and build a raft of hemlock bark, tied together with plenty of string from Johnny's own store, George almost forgot that he was not a boy himself.

The raft was intended to brave the rapid shallows of Raven Brook, and behaved very well with its crew of a toad, two beetles, and sundry earth-worms impressed by Johnny. But when he attempted to embark himself it sunk, and Johnny went in up to his bare knees, from which perilous position he was rescued by "Uncle George," who at once made a story out of it.

For George, to Johnny's supreme delight, developed a wonderful talent for story-telling. Not only could he recount the thrilling history of Jack the Giant-Killer, but that of other mythological beings of whom Johnny had never heard, and most of whom, I am inclined to think, originated in George's fancy, with some assistance from "The Arabian Nights' Entertainment," a favourite book of his own boyhood.

On Sundays these narratives took on a Biblical character. The story of Joseph was oftenest called for on the part of Johnny, perhaps because Uncle George related it with such pathos that at one particular point he (Johnny) always broke down, and with a sudden burst of tears begged the narrator "not

to tell any more, for he couldn't bear it." It was only after a series of attempts on successive Sundays that they were enabled to get beyond the selling of Joseph and the showing of the bloody coat of many colours to the bereaved father. After that Johnny always braced himself at that particular point with the thought of the good times to come in Egypt, though the episode of Benjamin and his cup came very near upsetting him every time.

George never got beyond walking feebly around the garden and by the brook. He spent much time in the sunny, shaded porch, with Olive knitting or sewing beside him, and Simple Nance moving furtively in the background, indulging hopes of being called upon for some service. They talked a good deal—of the simple every-day interests of their lives largely; but whatever the topic it was all interfused with Olive's gentle, Christly wisdom, which fell on her listener's ear like the music of David on that of Saul. For at times the evil influences of his life, spirits, call them what you like, returned and fought for possession of the soul they had well-nigh won.

There is a deep truth in that old belief that at the name of the Most High the spell of sorcery could be broken and the baffled demon put to flight. And it is not cant, but the profoundest truth to say that from a sin-blackened soul the demon of despair can only be exorcised in the name of

Him who conquered both Death and Hell on Calvary.

It was a beautiful summer, rarely so, even for that land of beautiful summers, New England. There were no droughts, neither an over-abundance of rain, but cloud and sunshine were evenly balanced, and the fields retained their verdure even through the torrid heats of July. The procession of the flowers moved on: the blood-red cardinal flower, the fragrant water-lily, and its tawny-throated cousin of the pastures, the orchids and columbines, the violets and apple blossoms, the wild rose and honeysuckle—all the fair sisterhood in their time and place. And autumn followed crowned with glory, the glory of the scarlet maple and crimson oak, of the golden hickory and birch, and of the purple ash. Through it all George held his own. But at the breath of chill November the feeble life flickered and went out.

“I love you; I have always loved you; I shall never cease to love you!” Olive had said many years before. And with his hand in hers, led by a love at once the type and earnest of one infinitely greater, George Harris went to his account.

Here, artistically perhaps, my story should end. But as I like to think, so would I have others, of Olive, the storm and stress over, lingering many years in the land of Beulah, where the shining ones come and go; growing old with Simple Nance, and Johnny stretching

up into stalwart manhood by her side. For so it was, and not till she had attained the ripe age of eighty did Olive cross that river of which Bunyan tells us that to some it "has its flowings, to others its ebbings;" that while "it has been in a manner dry for some, it has overflowed its banks for others."





A HIGH IDEAL.





A HIGH IDEAL.

THERE, there, Carline, don't say another word. I can't help it. What can I do? I didn't create 'em. I declare for 't you're enough to wear a man to a skilinton with your everlastin'" Rastus Wimpenny, 'Rastus Wimpenny!" and with an aggrieved air the speaker took up the pails containing the pig-wash and went out of the kitchen.

"Well, 'Rastus Wimpenny, if you can't do anything you might see some-thin'; you needn't be blind as a bat." Carline raised her voice for this parting shot, and then dropped it, muttering to herself as she went about her work, "I wish to goodness they'd never seen Becket. They'll be the death o' Mary yet, white as a sheet and not eatin' enough breakfast to keep a sparrer alive."

The speaker was prime minister of the house of Fox, and Mary was its sole child and heiress. It was Mary who had first suggested to her father

and mother the opening of their doors to these two summer boarders, the object of Carline's animadversions. Farmer Fox was well-to-do and under no necessity of resorting to this method to enlarge his revenues. But Mary, who had never been far from the immediate precincts of her home, and to whom Boston was as unfamiliar as Bagdad, and quite as full of delightful possibilities, had felt that it would be charming to have two girls near her own age yet with such different experiences for a few weeks in the old farmhouse.

So they had come, welcomed by Mary, who ran out when the stage from the nearest railway station, ten miles distant, drove into the door-yard, while good Mrs. Fox, broad and beaming, waited in the background, and Carline scowled like an angry and prophetic sibyl from a kitchen window. She "mistrusted 'em from the minute she set eyes on 'em," so she told 'Rastus. The tall one, with the hair over her eyes like a poodle-dog, pounced upon Mary like a hawk upon a chicken, and kissed her, when she had never seen her before that minute! "She's a sly one, 'Rastus Wimpenny, mark my words!"

'Rastus could not agree with Carline. To his masculine and inexperienced eye they were altogether too pretty to be other than perfect; and despite the fact that he was far on in middle life and perpetually nagged by Carline, he still retained that chivalrous feeling

towards woman as woman which is so marked a characteristic of the New Englander, however rough his exterior.

"Carline," he remonstrated, "you're always a-jealousin' that folks ain't what they set up to be. Why can't you take 'em at their own valooation till you find out different?"

Carline made no reply, but slammed the buttery door with a force that intimated that her sentiments were not likely to change.

Maude at the instant she caught sight of Mary had cried out that she had a "perfect Madonna face," and on learning her name had fallen into raptures over the "coincidence," and "Madonna Mary" she was dubbed from that moment. And as soon as Maude could get at her colours she proceeded to make a sketch of her, and before many hours had passed over had executed half a dozen, all with an aureole more or less faintly indicated. These falling under Carline's eye caused her to wonder what women those could be with an old-fashioned calash on.

While Maude's bent was distinctly artistic, Lucretia, by no means ignoring art, gave her strength to literature, and for the time being was devoted to Browning. She was a member of the "Tea-table Club," one of the multitudinous clubs of our American Athens, and was to read a paper on that illustrious poet at its early October meeting. She proposed to prepare this paper during her sojourn in this wilderness, for as such she regarded Becket with

its scattered aborigines. She it was who had "discovered" it. After the completion of her essay she would take flight for the more congenial atmosphere of Newport. It was a sacrifice, she acknowledged to her circle of intimates, but she hoped she was capable of immolating herself—temporarily—on the altar of the higher culture. And as she took her seat in the train on the day of her arrival she experienced, or fancied she did, something of the feeling of the mediæval sage who withdrew into the desert for purposes of contemplation. It is possible that she did not deceive herself, and that her father's declaration that the state of his finances would not warrant a prolonged season at Newport had nothing to do with her resolution to devote a certain number of weeks to Becket and Browning.

While, therefore, Maude's first thought on seeing Mary was of an artistic nature, Lucretia's naturally took another direction, and she was fired with an ambition to "elevate her ideals," to lift her from her present grovelling existence, to introduce her, if not into the holy of holies, at least into the outer courts of Brownningdom.

She took the first step towards that result on the second morning after her arrival.

But before proceeding further let us pause for a look at the proposed neophyte—Madonna Mary.

She was a sweet-faced, good-tempered girl, a true product of New England rural life, with a wild grace

such as renders the rose of the wood and field quite as attractive and lovely after its own fashion as the choicer product of the garden.

Reared in an atmosphere of affection, her nature was frank and her manners open. She looked out trustfully on her small world and all that strayed within its precincts. Her schooling had been limited to that of the district wherein she lived. She had read but little. The deluge of books which has inundated the world of late had passed by Becket or only penetrated in the smallest of streams. Book agents found it unprofitable ground, though one or two had left tokens of their presence at the farmhouse in the shape of two fat volumes on the parlour table—"The Prince of the House of David" and "The Innocents Abroad." Aside from these, the books of the farmhouse were few. Farmer Fox read little beside his Bible and his religious and agricultural newspapers.

There was an early publication of a now famous house called "The Family Library," decorously piled upon a mahogany light-stand in the sitting-room corner, thirty small volumes in a binding as severe and lugubrious—purple, verging upon black—as their contents. They included many memoirs, together with "Alleyne's Call" and other works of similar character. Only one of these had Mary read, but that one was enough in itself, she felt, to pardon the existence of the others. So often had she perused the charming allegory it had begun to

have a worn appearance, and to fall readily open at favourite spots. As to the others, though rapidly nearing a half-century of existence, they possessed a freshness of aspect that would have at once condemned them as unreadable in the estimation of that lover of shabby books, Charles Lamb.

About six months before the advent of our Bostonians a circulating library had made its appearance in Becket, a library that circulated literally on wheels. A young man in the neighbouring town of Haddington, incapacitated through lameness from active work, had set up a library and brought his books to the scattered farmhouses in a covered waggon, coming fortnightly.

At his first appearance Mary, in her ignorance, had asked him what was "good;" and he had handed out a small volume with the not-particularly attractive title of "Pride and Prejudice." "The doctor's daughter over to Haddington says that is first-rate; and you look as if you'd like what she does," said the peripatetic librarian.

Mary read it leisurely, without skipping, and had time for a re-perusal before the library again drew up at the farmhouse door, when she asked if the author had ever written any more. She had; and so one after the other the little country maiden read those novels so perennially fresh, and which have given delight to the finest minds of England and America. She had also read another book, the heroine of which,

by name "Sheila," she thought not unworthy to rank with Elizabeth Bennett and Fanny Price.

So, as we see, Lucretia had virgin soil upon which to plant her seeds whose fruit was to be "culture."

Mary was busy turning the cheeses on the morning of the second day after their arrival. This summer, for the first time, the dairy had been given into her charge, with Carline to assist in the heavier work, such as the churning and getting the cheeses into press. The cheeses were kept in cupboards with doors of linen, and Mary was turning them on the shelves—a daily and necessary process—and rubbing them with a preparation of fats. The great press, with its weight of rusty iron, stood in one corner, and there was a sweet odour of whey about the place. It was an unfinished apartment with open roof, and projected from the main part of the house, and had two doors to the north and south.

That to the north opened upon the wide door-yard with its close, fine turf and gnarled, bushy-headed apple trees of the summer-sweeting variety. The south door looked out upon the grassy clothes plot ; it was shaded by a spreading greening tree, in which a silent predatory "coo-coo" was consuming the occupants of a tent-caterpillars' nest. The other side of the greening was the wood-shed, to which was attached in a long line the piggery, the cider-mill, the sheep and cow barns, and the stable with their capacious yards, all well away

from the immediate vicinity of the farmhouse.

Lucretia had seated herself on the wide south-door stone. Maude was busy sketching the Madonna of the Cheeses. In the distance, seen from the south door, rose the sharp back of Sodom Mount, green with pines and the summer verdure of oaks. The whole atmosphere without and within was one of repose. The snap of the coo-coo's beak as caterpillar after caterpillar met its fate could be distinctly heard; so could the soft paddling of Maude's brush in the water-pot. Swallows swept silently and swiftly in and out of the wood-shed, on one of the rafters of which was a nest of gaping beaks.

Lucretia broke the silence with the question, "Do you always expect to do this sort of thing, Mary, darling?"

"Oh, I suppose so," was the reply, as Mary lifted down a huge sage-cheese with a leaf of rose-geranium pressed into its surface to indicate its species.

"But don't you often have aspirations for something higher? Don't you long to do some great thing in the world?" persisted Lucretia, playing with the ivory tablets that hung from her girdle ready to catch the fleeting inspirations of the moment.

"Oh, I couldn't do anything great if I tried," replied Mary, briskly. "I did think once I would keep school, but father said I never would have spunk enough to lick the boys. So I gave it up."

Lucretia lifted her eyebrows and

shrugged her shoulders, meaning to imply thereby pity mingled with indulgence. After a pause she patiently renewed her efforts.

"But don't you think, Mary, darling, that it is our duty to make the most of ourselves and our talents? Now I feel I have no right to bury mine. There is no necessity of my writing for publication, of course. But I do feel that I ought not to neglect my really superior gift that way. And our club never pays; it prefers spontaneous work. Have you ever tried composition, Mary, dear?"

"Oh, yes, indeed; when I went to school we had to write compositions every week, and I hated it. I never could think of anything to write. Once teacher told me to write about hens. She thought I knew about hens, and I just wrote: 'Hens lay eggs and hatch chickens and ducks,' and that was all I could think to write. But I *can* do better now," Mary went on, with a little access of pride in her voice; "I wrote a paper on butter-making for the farmers' club, and father said 'twas first-rate. He said I knew when to stop, which was a great thing."

Butter and hens! But Lucretia reflected that Rome was not built in a day.

"But, Mary, darling, that is not exactly what I mean. Butter is all very well in its place, but don't you have some ideal, some grand thing in your mind that you want to be or do? Emerson says, you know, that we should hitch our waggon to a star."

At this astounding astronomical statement Mary, who had just lifted the huge sage-cheese back to its place, turned and stared. Then she laughed. She wondered if Fanny Price ever hitched her waggon to a star. Such a droll idea !

"I beg pardon, Lucretia"—the Bostonians in the first flush of intimacy had decreed that all ceremonial titles should be laid aside—"but it sounds so funny. I don't know what it means. I am very ignorant ; not like you." She finished humbly, for she saw her laugh had grated upon Lucretia's ear. The latter gathered herself up to explain.

"Oh, all this work, you know, that you are doing, Mary, darling, doesn't require brains. Anybody can do it ; the commonest people, you know. There are other things, and it is really such a pity you should be so thrown away. Women have such an influence, and you might be such a power in the world ; and then we owe a duty to ourselves to make the most of ourselves, to aspire, to——"

Here the turkey-gobbler, who had been prospecting about the wood-pile for crickets and similar vermin, enraged at sight of the scarlet ribbons on Lucretia's elaborate morning gown, made a run at her, and amid the ensuing confusion, Mary coming to the rescue and beating off the belligerent gobbler, all further attempts at an explanation of the Emersonian ideal were deferred.

The next day was Sunday, and the

whole household, with the exception of the two visitors and 'Rastus, went to meeting. Much surprise was expressed when Lucretia and Maude declined the seats offered in the high carry-all which Farmer Fox himself drove. To him and his family Sunday was the festival of the week. On that day they met their acquaintances from all parts of the town, and there was much gossip before service in the vestibule and about the horse-sheds, to say nothing of the hour at noon between the two sermons, when they ate their lunches socially in the meeting-house itself, or in some neighbouring kitchen or sitting-room hospitably open.

Politics were discussed, and the state of the roads, the last county court to which one or more had gone as jury-men, the crops—in short, the meeting-house on Sunday was a general exchange to which everybody resorted to talk of that which interested him most.

Naturally Lucretia and Maude felt no such drawings to the common centre. Neither did the plain service possess attractions. Lucretia had begun life as an ardent Unitarian. Finding insufficient room for expansion within that communion, she had migrated to the High Church wing of the Episcopal denomination. This harbour proving also incommodious, she had put out upon the shoreless sea of Theosophy, finding here ample room to drift. "The old beliefs," she was wont to say, "may satisfy the common mind; but as for me, I adore Buddha!"

Was it to be expected of her to attend upon the simple service of a rural congregation held in a little wooden meeting-house, shingled and painted white, through the open windows of which—great staring windows of plain glass—the twitterings of birds and rustlings of leaves floated in and mingled with the prayer and praise? to listen, too, to antiquated doctrine expounded by a man who hoed his own potatoes and milked his own cow? Go to! And with "The Red Cotton Nightcap Country" in her hand, she betook herself to Mary's hammock under a group of Norway spruces, and there fell fast asleep, while "The Red Cotton Nightcap" dropped over the hammock's edge into the grass, and was inspected by bewildered ants and daddy-longlegs, and all that small folk whose habitat lies under our feet. Maude, without any pretext of keeping awake, made herself comfortable on the sitting-room lounge, and both awoke much refreshed for the late four o'clock dinner—a Sunday institution.

After dinner the family gathered upon the north porch, Farmer Fox comfortable in his shirt-sleeves, having laid aside his well-preserved Sunday coat of broadcloth. The gate opened, and a young man walked up the path between the rows of phlox and tiger-lilies. He was broad-shouldered, of medium height, with brown hair and beard and a pair of observant brown eyes. His general appearance was somewhat rustic, but his air was that

of a man who respected his own calling, modest but with no taint of shyness. He was introduced under the name of Mr. Hall. Lucretia responded to the introduction with what is called "a well-bred stare," while Maude inspected him through her eye-glasses with a well-affected air of innocent wonder as who should say, What strange animal is this? Both instantly recognized in him a possible nullifier of their schemes for Mary's advancement.

"Well, John," said Farmer Fox, heartily, "the parson give us a couple o' good sarmons to-day. The powerfulest he's gi'n us yet. Ruther stiff on doctrine perhaps for some folks. But a good fault. He's orthodox; there's no disputin' that, and great in argyment."

John did not respond, and there were several moments of silence, broken again by Farmer Fox, who, feeling that he had paid the tribute due to the day by touching upon the sermons, now introduced a more secular topic.

"Them Jerseys are doin' first-rate, John; I'm glad I took your advice about 'em. And I shall get rid of every Ayrshire on the place as fast as I can. Squire Allan's thinking o' takin' 'em off my hands. He don't take to Jerseys. He sticks to the Ayrshires. He goes in for beef. I reckon 'Mis' Allan don't care about makin' butter. She's kind o' discouraged, I guess. She never got higher'n the fourth or fifth premium at the Cattle Show, and Mis' Fox and Mary take the first right straight along

every time. Mary'll soon beat her mother on butter. She has a real knack at fixin' it up."

Even this compliment to Mary elicited but the faintest response from John. It was evident that he proposed to discuss neither sermon nor Jerseys in the presence of these fine ladies who calmly ignored him, making remarks aside to each other and to Mary who sat in the doorway. John was leaning against one of the porch supports. He looked beseechingly at Mary. At last she arose and came forward, and together they walked down the path, turned into a side gate, and disappeared in the orchard.

"So those are the boarders you said you were going to have," remarked John. "Ladies you said. Well, if you call them ladies I don't agree with you."

John was evidently out of temper. It is trying even to the most modest of men to be entirely ignored.

"Oh, how can you say so, John! I think they're lovely. I'm sure, John, you never saw such lovely dresses in your life! I never did. And they ain't a bit stuck-up. They call me Mary, and I call them Lucretia and Maude. And they know such lots of things that I never even heard of; and they are going to teach me. Maude is going to teach me to draw. And Lucretia talks so beautifully about what I can do. To be sure I can't quite understand. But I shall by and by, Lucretia says. She says I couldn't

expect to know much living all my life in Becket, and never seeing Boston."

"Becket folks needn't go to Boston to learn good manners, anyway," replied John, still more irate, and by no means mollified by Mary's speech. "I'd have knocked a man down that looked at me the way those girls did. They don't come up to my idea of ladies. And you'll find I'm right, Mary. They're just making a fool of you, filling your head with all sorts of nonsense that'll do you more hurt than good."

John was not very wise. But what man ever is when angry and in love?

"Well, John," replied Mary, angry in her turn, "I think I can take care of myself without any of your advice. I like them better than any girls I ever saw. And father and mother like them too. They're just lovely, say what you will, John. And it is ever so good of them to want to teach me. And we're going to read together. And I'm going to get father and mother to let me go to Boston in the fall. I'm going to try and make something of myself, as Lucretia says."

"Oh, well, Mary, you will do as you like, of course——"

"Of course I shall, John."

"But I sha'n't come here again as long as they are here."

"You can do as *you* like, John."

"And I warn you again, Mary. You are mistaken. They are not real. They are humbugs. They've got money enough, that's plain. But they ain't ladies. Ladies don't set themselves

up above other folks that way and display their knowledge. I know a lady when I see one. You're a lady yourself, Mary. You'd never think of doing so. There are lots o' those people who think, just because they live in Boston or some other city, they're superior to us country folks. But I don't see it. They're just making a fool of you to pass away the time. When they've done they'll throw you overboard. They're idle, good-for-nothing rich people, dabbling in all sorts of trash and calling it 'culture'."

Doubtless John in his anger overshoot the exact truth. Always wholesomely busy himself, he knew nothing of the absorbing nature of fads. The Bostonians were not playing a part; for the time being they were in dead earnest. Their zeal for Mary's advancement was a passing one, but real while it lasted. They were rich, it is true—and idle. And according to Dr. Watts, Satan finds employment more or less mischievous for such.

John and Mary parted in anger, the latter quite determined now to throw herself wholly into the arms of her new friends and let them carry her whither they would.

The next morning the two followed Mary to the dairy, which was built over a spring at the bottom of the orchard. It was not a noisy, bubbling spring sent up by some strong hydraulic pressure; but the water oozed almost imperceptibly through the silvery white sand that formed its bed; a broad shallow pool

in which the pans of milk were set to cool, together with the pots of cream and stone crocks in which the butter made into pats and swathed in linen awaited the market.

The broad shelves were filled with pans of milk on which the cream was thickening, yellow and fragrant, the product of the high-bred Jerseys who were feeding on the sloping hill-side pastures just beyond. The open windows were covered with wire netting, over which morning-glories had been permitted to scramble, the blue, pink, and white bells of which had not yet begun to curl with the heat of the day. The open door looked out towards the hills, down which swept a gentle breeze scented with the woody odours of the forests that topped them.

Mary was working over the morning's churning of butter, pressing out the buttermilk with wooden spatulas, and moulding it into quarter and half-pound pats, each stamped with some pretty design. Her sleeves were pinned up high upon her shoulders, displaying her round white arms with their pink elbows and tapering wrists. A large white apron enveloped her from neck to feet, and her hair was covered with a white linen kerchief arranged like the yellow head-dress of a negress. It was a pretty sight to watch her patting the small portions of butter, tossing it lightly and unerringly from hand to hand betwixt the wooden spatulas. She had the air of perfectly understanding her work so satisfactory to a spectator,

whether that work be the moulding of butter or the modelling of clay. As the two Bostonians came up and looked in, for once at least the admiration they expressed must have been genuine.

"Oh, how perfectly lovely you look, Mary, darling!" exclaimed Maude producing her colour-box and water-pot. "And what a sweet place! too utterly sweet for anything! perfectly idyllic! And what darling little pats of butter! too, too delicious! Oh, I must sketch you, Madonna Mary, just as you are! Such a pity that you can't stand just so! The pose is absolutely perfect; but I suppose you can't."

No, Mary couldn't. It was growing warm, and the butter must be put into shape with the utmost expedition and set to cool in the spring.

Lucretia seated herself in the doorway and toyed with her tablets, swinging them round and round by their slender gold chain.

"You do look charming, Mary, darling. A little too milkmaidish, perhaps. And it was all thrown away, with nobody to admire till we came," she remarked, with something of the cockneyism that thinks a wild flower has failed of its mission unless it be transferred to its particular buttonhole. "But we will change all that. You were not made to bloom in the desert, dear. You would be charming at a Fancy Dress Party, in that costume and tossing real butter about. A delicious idea!" And she made a note of it on her tablets. "You will be a

success, Mary: You only need a little instruction and polishing. And, Mary, dearest," this very coaxingly, "you must not spoil everything by throwing yourself away on a clodhopper. In fact, if you want to make anything of yourself you must not marry at all."

Mary might have resented this very evident fling at John in the word "clodhopper," had she not still been burning with the anger of the previous night.

"Now I have always declined to marry," continued Lucretia. "I always do say that marriage is well enough for ordinary girls. But for women with a career before them, nothing could be more foolish. When one marries, one becomes a cipher, an appendage. I frequently say I never shall marry. It is best to nip all hopes of that kind in the bud."

She spoke as though the buds so nipped had been legion. It may have been so; for she was young, pretty, and above all rich!

"I have often thought I should like to establish a salon like those charming French women we read about. Why shouldn't we have such an institution in America? And there would be the very place for you, Mary. You wouldn't be the first little maiden who has entered a salon and become at last a leader in one of her own, like, like——" Lucretia's memory failed her here. Was she thinking of Madame Mohl, or of whom? "Is not that something to aspire to, to live for, instead of marrying and settling down to butter-

making and cooking, and all those tiresome things *anybody* can do? Isn't that an ideal worth having?"

"Do tell me something about those say—saylongs, Lucretia," said Mary, bringing down the stamp with a firm hand, and evolving from the surface of the golden butter a jolly little Jersey cow with slender legs and a brush at the end of her tail. "Isn't it pretty?" she asked, holding it up for Lucretia's admiration.

"Oh, yes," replied Lucretia, indifferently; "but it's purely mechanical, you know. Anybody can stamp butter. But to model, Mary!—ah! *that* takes genius!"

Lucretia was a member of a modelling club, and had herself modelled several figures declared unanimously by the members to indicate a remarkable aptitude. She belonged to many clubs, all classable under the general designation of M. A. S.

In the meantime Maude was silently listening and working, and had already finished a sketch of the Madonna of the Milk-pans. She prided herself on the rapidity of her execution.

But there was another listener to this conversation—Carline, who was gathering golden-sweets for baking, just in the rear of the dairy. She at once caught Lucretia's meaning, and boiling with suppressed rage, and without waiting to hear the exposition of French salons upon which Lucretia was about to enter, betook herself to the woodshed where 'Rastus was sawing wood.

"'Rastus Wimpenny ! 'Rastus Wimpenny, as sure as you're alive that good-for-nothin' creatur' is advisin'—reelly advisin' our Mary not to marry John ! As if it hadn't be'n foreordained from the beginnin' that them two was to marry, and the house planned, and all ! And now them two empty-headed creatur's are tryin' to break it up. Oh, I should like to knock their heads together well ! Their brains 'ud rattle like seeds in a dry punkin ! The empty-headed trollops ! And how you can stand there and saw, and saw, and never speak a word, I don't see, 'Rastus Wimpenny ! You're enough to provoke a saint !"

"Come, come, Carline," mildly remonstrated 'Rastus, "don't work yourself up into a fever about nothin'. 'Tain't at all likely they'll turn Mary ag'in John. If you ain't careful you'll get a stroke. You're quite purple now."

"Don't be a fool, 'Rastus Wimpenny ! I guess I know when I'm flustered an' when I ain't. And if you *can* stop sawin' a minute I wish you'd jest tell me what a say-loon is. That's what they're talkin' about—a say-loon !" For thus had Carline's Yankee ear and tongue transformed the French word.

Carline did not often condescend to ask for information, and 'Rastus felt the importance of the occasion. He deliberated, changing his tobacco from the left cheek to the right, and ejecting a cataract of saliva.

"A say-loon, Carline ! A say-loon !

You must mean a sea-loon. It's a bird, say-loon is—a sea bird."

"Jest as if I don't know what a loon is, 'Rastus Wimpenny. I've picked 'em, an' parb'iled 'em, an' stewed 'em, an' eat 'em! *Say-loon* is what she said. She was goin' to 'stablish a say-loon an' take in our Mary."

A light broke upon 'Rastus' mind.

"Well, why didn't you say so, then, in the first place, and 'a' done with it? A say-loon, Carline, is a place where they sell victuals and drink. There's two over to Southfield."

Carline was speechless. Was it to 'stablish a place to sell victuals and drink that Mary was to be persuaded to give up John?

As the days sped by Mary abandoned herself more and more to the delights of this new companionship. Between the Browning lessons and the talks concerning that high ideal towards which they were supposably straining, were intervals devoted to walking, and to drives about the beautiful hill country, through the woods of Wild-Cat Lane, under primeval oaks and pines, and down through the narrow pass into the lovely valley where Haddington lies.

But it must be confessed that the expositions of Browning resulted very unsatisfactorily. In vain did Lucretia read out long passages from "*Sordello*" and "*Strafford*," and discourse upon their meaning, which to herself she declared was crystal-clear. Mary was simply stupefied. "*The Pied Piper*" would have pleased her; that she could

have comprehended. But Lucretia rather regretted that Mr. Browning ever wrote that charming narrative. Its lines were too clearly etched, its meaning too obvious. Through so narrow and obscure a door she could never consent to introduce a neophyte into the temple of the master.

She was becoming weary of it all when a loophole of escape was offered her one evening when they had gone up to the hill-pasture for the cows. Mary often went for the cows when the men were busy, and it was a chore she particularly liked. She liked the long walk in the decline of the day, and the peace that at that hour brooded over field and wood—a quiet broken only by the song of the robin or the vesper hymn of the hermit thrush. She had only to let down the bars for the cows to pass out, after which the collie took them in charge and conveyed them safely to the milking yard. Then the hour was hers to do what she liked.

She was a fair botanist, the rudiments of which science John had taught her; and by observation she had become familiar with the haunts and habits of the birds and small wild animals, the chipmunks and red squirrels, the weasels, and even the shy and rare fox. If she was stupid over "Sordello," she sparkled with enthusiasm over these. She had just shown the Bostonians an abandoned robin's nest, and was telling them how she had rescued the nestlings from the fangs of a black snake, whose baleful head was oscillating above the

terrified creatures, ready to strike, when she espied him—when she was interrupted in the middle of her narrative by Lucretia, who clasped her waist, crying out—

“Oh, Mary, darling, *now* I see what your forte is! It isn't literature—oh no! We made a great mistake there. It isn't literature nor art. It is—it is *biology*!”

Mary looked at her bewildered. Biology! She had never even heard the word. What could it mean? What strange creature was it?

“I don't know what it is, Lucretia. What is bi—biology?” she said.

“Oh, it's all about what you've been talking about, you dear creature, you! About birds and plants—the beginnings, you know—and animals. It tells how they're made. They weren't created, you know. That theory's exploded. It's all about cells and protoplasm, and you look at things through a microscope, and you dissect—cats and clams. Margaret Mather dissected a cat and made such lovely drawings! So instructive and interesting to know how a cat is made! And then you dredge for sea things and——”

“And that is so picturesque!” interrupted Maude, feeling that the subject had drifted within the scope of her art. “There was a party dredging at Swampscot last summer, in short gowns and Gainsborough hats, and they waded about in the most adorable way, and wore pink and scarlet stockings. They made a perfectly exquisite picture!

Everybody ought to wear bright things on a beach." And she immediately conceived a sketch of the Madonna in a dredging costume.

"And it just completes us, we three. Literature, art, and science! Such a charming trio! Oh, it is just too perfect! You must certainly come to Boston now, Mary, darling. Such a sensation as we shall make at the 'Tea-able'! Literature, art, and science!"

Lucretia, to borrow a word from her own vocabulary, was "radiant." She had found a new fad, and had triumphantly slipped out of the Browning difficulty.

As to Mary, she was simply stunned by this fresh avalanche of knowledge so unexpectedly precipitated upon her. How much these two did know! It was wonderful, it was marvellous how two such small heads "could carry all they knew." She felt deeply her own ignorance; she was profoundly humiliated.

Not many days after, the Farmers' Institute met at Becket. There was a local Farmers' Club that met fortnightly in the evening, seven months of the year, the same for which Mary had prepared her paper on butter-making. At each meeting a paper was read on some such subject as "Domestic Cookery," "What crops to plant, and how to plant them," "What industry can be encouraged that will give our young farmers lucrative employment during the winter months?" A discussion followed the paper, after which coffee, cakes, and fruits were served. Any member who

declined to take part in the discussion was fined twenty-five cents, by which happy arrangement the coffers of the club were never entirely empty.

The Farmers' Institute was a yearly institution, and was composed of delegates from similar clubs throughout the county. The sessions were to be held in the town-house, but the dinner would be served in a mammoth tent. The younger women were to act as waiters, and, to Mary's great delight, Lucretia and Maude offered to join their ranks. Each waitress wore a cap and apron, and nothing could be lovelier, in Mary's opinion, than the aprons of these two, composed of equal parts of lace and silk, while their caps were more like hoar-frost than any lace she ever saw.

Her own white apron with its neat embroidery and her plain white cap were quite homespun in comparison. But that was as it should be, and no amount of admiration bestowed upon herself could have given her the thrill of delight she experienced at the evident admiration they inspired.

They entered the hall together. It was crowded with both men and women for the latter were active members of the clubs, and three or four were on the platform as delegates, whereon also sat the chairman of the day, Farmer Fox, the Hon. Alfred Seaver, Chairman of the Board of Agriculture, and the Hon. Hiram Jones, member in the Lower House of Congress for that district, whose term of office was about to expire, and who hoped for a re-election.

The latter gentleman, it was currently reported, could not tell a spade from a wheelbarrow, and had once ordered his gardener to dig up and replant a row of beans that had come up in unseemly fashion—beans first—instead of in the way proper to all well-intentioned seeds. He managed, however, to impart a strongly agricultural flavour to his political speech, and was not sparing of suave compliments to the “fairer portion of the audience,” by which phrase he designated the excellent and, for the most part, rather careworn farmers’ wives.

Papers were read on agricultural topics, and there was one from John, which took Mary by surprise. She did not know that he was to read. In fact the appointment had been a late one, and although her mother knew of it, she had not told Mary. Mary’s whole conduct of late had puzzled that good woman. She seemed to be entirely carried away with those Boston girls.

Mrs. Fox began to doubt whether Mary had ever really cared for John. His absence did not affect her. In fact she didn’t seem to notice it. She had never been in better spirits. She was happy as the day was long.

Mary had not seen John since the Sunday night they parted in anger. And as he came forward manuscript in hand, and was received with applause by the people with whom he was a great favourite, she looked at him with a different feeling from any she had ever before experienced. It was as though

scales had suddenly fallen from her eyes. For the first time in her life she seemed really to look at him. If, as her mother conjectured, she had never really cared for him only in friendly fashion, that time was past. For at that look love sprang up, full-fledged, in her heart. He had been but a nestling before, brooded upon and awaiting his wings.

As John began to read, her cheeks flushed, and her heart beat and fluttered after a fashion quite unfamiliar to her. She followed breathlessly each word of his paper, dreading lest he should make a slip, and admiring the manly fashion in which he read it, with a clear voice and perfect self-possession. She leaned forward eagerly, with her lips slightly apart. As he concluded she sank back with a sigh of relief and satisfaction. She had never thought John particularly handsome. He was very well, had been her highest praise. But now she said to herself that no one on the platform could compare with him for manly beauty. How superior he looked to the Honourable Alfred, even to the Honourable Hiram !

John's was the closing paper, and directly after every one had risen from their seats, and the whole audience were moving about. Mary, dazed with this new emotion, hardly knew what was going on about her, and when she did see clearly she found that Lucretia and Maude had left her side. The Honourable Hiram was shaking hands with John and congratulating him. Others came up to him. She heard her father's

voice, joyous and distinct. "That was first-rate, John! You're a credit to Becket!"

But who was that standing with her hand in his, and looking up coquettishly into his face? Could it possibly be Lucretia? Yes, it was. She was saying something to him, smiling into his eyes. Mary fancied she could hear the coaxing tones of her voice. She was paying him one of her sugared compliments, doubtless. Mary found herself absurdly wondering if she said, "John, darling." John made a laughing reply, and Lucretia responded. Others drew back, leaving the two standing together. They became absorbed in their conversation. By and by Lucretia took John's arm and joined the crowd that were moving towards the tent.

Then Mary suddenly awoke to a remembrance of her duty, that of superintending a section of the tables, and also moved away. But another emotion had taken its place beside the newly-fledged love, that of jealousy.

What right had Lucretia to speak to John and look at him like that, after what she had said—she, too, who had professed that she did not care for men, only after a Platonic fashion? Platonic, indeed! If there was any such thing as flirtation, Lucretia was openly flirting with John. He had seated himself at the table, and she had constituted herself his waitress. She was passing him salad—the very salad that Mary herself had dressed and decorated! Mary hardly knew herself for the moment,

such a rage of jealousy took possession of her. She would liked to have shaken Lucretia ; to tear the two apart ; to seize upon the salad dish and pour its contents upon the ground. Jealousy is not, alas ! a dignified emotion, though a very vulture in the heart of which it has taken possession.

And there was Maude, too, smiling upon the young men ! But then Maude had never set up to be Platonic. And how charming they were ! Not only the cynosure of neighbouring eyes like Mr. Milton's beauty, but of every eye in the tent. Strangers were asking who they were. Where was now Mary's innocent admiration of them ? Oh that she had never seen them ! And she turned sadly to her duties.

One other shared Mary's feeling—Carline, who was pouring tea in a corner curtained off the main tent. "Jest see that creatur', 'Rastus Wim-penny, a-flutterin' round John like a May-bug round a candle. Advisin' our Mary not to have John, an' a-courtin' him herself ! *Hypocrit' !*" and Carline rattled the teacups till they gave out a sound like a Chinese gong.

It was all over at last—the dinner, the speeches, and the clearing away of tables. Among the last to drive off was Farmer Fox and his family. When they came to seat themselves in the carry-all Lucretia was missing.

"She's gone to drive with Mr. Hall," Maude explained. "They've been gone a long time."

The drive home was a silent one

Maude was cross at Lucretia's defection, and Mary heart-broken at this further proof of John's interest in her. She declined the supper pressed upon her by Carline, and went at once to her bedroom. It was already late. She sat down by the open window and gazed listlessly out.

Under other circumstances she would have observed the beauty of the night. The moon was at its full, riding high in the heavens, and flooding the landscape with light. But she could see only John and Lucretia smiling up into his face. She laid her head upon her hands folded upon the window-seat. She knew nothing of the passing of time. A whip-poor-will called from the orchard near by, and was answered by one in a distant field. Then she heard wheels at the gate. John was there with his buggy. There was the sound of gay laughter and jest; then good-night was said, the wheels moved off, and Lucretia came in and up to her bedroom. Mary heard what she said as she talked across to Maude in her bedroom.

"We really had a charming drive. He isn't so bad, after all; and he really has an idea or two. We went round and looked at his cabbages and onions by moonlight. Quite romantic, wasn't it? We sat a long time, and he was really quite eloquent. I inspired him, I suppose. I think him really quite smitten with your humble servant. But then you can't wonder, after seeing those women and girls there to-day. Such guys! Heigh-ho! I feel quite

sentimental. I shouldn't wonder if he came round again to take me out ! He hinted as much. Tired, are you ? Well, good-night !”

This was the last straw, and, throwing herself on her bed, Mary gave way to a passion of tears. It was her pale and tear-stained face that called forth the next morning from Carline the sentiments expressed in the opening paragraphs of this story.

Through the day Mary, carefully avoiding Lucretia and Maude, moved listlessly about in the performance of her household duties. As the sun was going down, Carline, who followed her all day with anxious eyes, saw her go out and take the footpath that led up the hill-side to a point overlooking the farm where John lived with his father. The farmhouse stood close under the shelter of the hill, while the lands sloped to the west and south. The long shadows were stretching across them as Mary paused on the brow of the hill and looked down. The farm was large, and on a knoll at one extremity, a gentle swell of green turf surmounted with a giant oak, John had often said he meant to build a house some day.

As Mary leaned against a tall pine and looked down two tears started from her blue eyes and ran down her cheeks. She was not a heroic heroine, this Mary of ours. Another two quickly followed, and soon there was a whole sparkling shower, and right in the middle of it a voice said—

“ Mary ! ”

She turned quickly. "Oh, John "

An hour later they were walking back along the footpath. Daylight was fading, the stars were coming out, and the fire-flies were spangling the meadows.

The tears on Mary's face had given place to smiles and dimples. She was swinging her hat by its ribbons.

"John," she said, and her head drooped shamefacedly — "John, you were right. They were only playing with me ; and how silly I have been !"

"Not silly, Mary. It was no wonder you liked them. They are very pretty, and Lucretia, as you call her, can be very agreeable when she likes."

Mary looked up apprehensively. "Oh, John !"

"Well, Little One ?"—it was Farmer Fox's pet name for his only daughter.

Then she told him what Lucretia had said the night before.

John laughed. "Perhaps I ought not to say it," he said, "but it is due to you. I should never have taken her to ride if she hadn't as good as asked me to. I couldn't help myself. And," he added, with a twinkle of the brown eyes, "she may be awfully learned and accomplished, but, in my opinion, she is ready to flirt with any man that comes along, even a raiser of cabbages and onions. She wants to keep her hand in, I suppose."

Carline, who during Mary's absence had been fluttering in and out of the door like an alarmed hen whose only chicken has disappeared, saw the two

coming. She hastened into the kitchen, where 'Rastus was gently dozing in his round-about chair.

"'Rastus Wimpenny! 'Rastus Wimpenny, wake up!" she cried, shaking him vigorously. "Here's our Mary and John comin', walkin' together jest like two turkey-doves! It's all right. Bless the Lord!"

"Didn't I tell y' so?" asked 'Rastus.



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